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The grand adventure

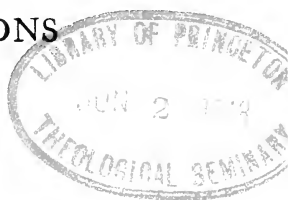
THE GRAND ADVENTURE

R O B E R T L A W , D . D .



I am
Yours very truly
Robert Edgar

THE GRAND ADVENTURE AND OTHER SERMONS



By
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AUTHOR OF "THE TESTS OF LIFE,"
"THE EMOTIONS OF JESUS," ETC., ETC.



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TO MY
SOLDIER-SONS,
ROBERT, RALPH AND RONALD,
AND
THEIR COMRADES IN THE
19TH AND THE 187TH BATTALIONS, C. E. F.

PREFACE

Of the sermons contained in this volume, those which have been preached during the period of the War endeavour to treat of some of its aspects and lessons; but it is not specifically a volume of War-sermons. All of them are published practically as they were preached, no attempt having been made to modify the style, which, as I am aware, is better adapted to the pulpit than to the printed page. For the publication there is the usual excuse, that it has been urged upon me by many to whose wishes it is a satisfaction, if not exactly a duty, to defer; to which, I acknowledge, must be added the special pleasure afforded by the dedication.

ROBERT LAW.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. GOD'S WRESTLING.....	13
II. THE LAW OF NON-RESISTANCE.....	25
III. THE LAW OF STEWARDSHIP.....	39 ✓
IV. POLITICS ACCORDING TO CHRIST.....	52
V. WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?.....	66 ✓
VI. IT IS FINISHED.....	76
VII. INTO THY HANDS.....	87
VIII. STRENGTH AND BEAUTY.....	99
IX. THE PATTERN OF THE WEB.....	112
X. THE COURT OF APPEAL.....	125
XI. PROVIDENCE IN THE FALL OF A SPARROW..	137
XII. A TRAGEDY OF BLUNDER.....	149
XIII. THE WONDER-WORKING GOD.....	161
XIV. THE FALL OF JERICO.....	173
XV. CAIN AND CHRIST.....	185
XVI. THE BLOOD OF ABEL AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.....	196
XVII. THE GRAND ADVENTURE.....	208

THE GRAND ADVENTURE

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I

GOD'S WRESTLING

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.—Gen. 34: 24.

Jacob's life is the story of a sin, a retribution and a repentance. It begins with his heartless betrayal of his brother and infamous deception of his blind old father, a sin which we see steadily tracking him down through long years of trouble and sorrow. Twenty years have passed since he did the evil, and one might have imagined that its full harvest of consequences would have been reaped long ere now. On the contrary, the crop was lustily growing, and was still far from ripe. At first the antagonist standing in Jacob's way was only Esau vowing vengeance; now it is Esau at the head of four hundred men. But first of all and last of all it was God. Jacob did not recognise this. He thought still that it was only Esau and his four hundred he had to reckon with; and, after the first moments of alarm and depression, he felt little doubt of his ability to circumvent that obstacle. He

could count upon his brother's impulsive temperament. Prepare the way by sending some handsome gifts in advance; follow these up with eloquent apology, humble submission, and touching appeal, and all would be well.

In this mood, feeling as self-complacently as ever how much more than a match he is for the strong-handed but slow-witted Esau, and confident of the success of his well-laid plans, Jacob takes his staff in hand to ford the stream and enter the Promised Land, when suddenly he finds himself arrested. The form of a man steps out of the darkness and seizes him in a grip of iron, inexorably blocks his way, foils all his efforts, until the self-confident pertinacious man who thought he had but to "cover Esau's face" with a gift and go on his way, triumphing in his diplomacy, falls at the feet of his mysterious foe, crushed and helpless. For the first time in his life Jacob feels what it is to have come to an end of all resources, to be held in a grasp against which it is vain to contend; and when the agony of the long struggle ends in his utter collapse, in that moment Jacob dies; the self-will and self-confidence, the Jacob-nature in him expires. The sinew of his strength and pride is withered. He is a man broken in spirit, who will never again be what he was, but will walk through life with the consciousness that there is something in the world which is not pliable to his will, a righteousness he cannot evade, a power in whose hands he is nothing.

But mark what follows. Jacob's antagonist becomes the angel of blessing. In the moment in which he falls he catches sight of the calm, compassionate face of his adversary; and in that moment the vanquished

wrestler changes his attitude. When a man can no longer wrestle and contend in his strength, he can still cling in his weakness; and as a terrified child clasps its arms tightly around its father's neck, so Jacob clings to his conqueror. With sobs and entreaties from the broken heart of a strong man he cries, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." It is the grand turning-point of Jacob's life. "Disarmed of all other weapons, he at last finds and uses the only weapons with which God is conquered"—the weapons of conscious weakness and sinfulness and utter need. Face to face with God, hanging helpless with his arms around him, he finds in surrender the blessing he could never win by native craft and strength; for we read, He blessed him there. Brethren, it is this that wins our battles with God; not our riches, but our poverty; not our fulness, but our need; not our wholeness, but our brokenness. A broken and a contrite heart the Lord will not despise.

This picture from Jacob's history is a wondrous parable of life; and many of you see something of your own experience mirrored in it. In one way or another God is wrestling with us half the time: that is why life is often so hard, why we suffer so many blows and falls, so many disappointments and defeats. God wrestles with men in all that we comprehensively call trouble. The first thing trouble does is to pull us up sharply as you check a horse upon the curb, to remind us convincingly that there is another will than our own at work in our life. Is not that always the first effect of the shock of trouble? Like Jacob we lay our course; we live to do our own will and carry

out our own plans. We launch out upon the sea of life knowing that the voyage is not without its hazards, that there are rocks and shoals ahead; but we are tolerably confident of our own power to give these a wide berth, while we steer steadily for our goal. But by-and-by God's storm comes down and shocks us into reality. We learn that this sea of life on which we are sailing is not our sea, made just to float our vessel and carry it whither we desire; that ours is not the governing will. The seriousness, it may be the awfulness of life, meets us face to face. It is thus God wrestles with men; and it is the mark of the value He sets upon us. No one would wrestle with a block of wood or a bundle of straw, nor expend his strength and art upon that which all his exertions cannot change for the better. It is because we are men, and because He would make us truer, humbler, stronger men, that God will sometimes, as it were, strip Himself for conflict with us and wear us down with long exhausting grapple, or lie in ambush and spring upon us at unawares, and, turning against us those very things which are our pride and strength, beat us to the earth, or touch us with the finger of some biting and fiery providence in honour's or affection's most sensitive spot. All this He will unsparingly do if thereby He can make us truer, humbler, stronger men. Truer men: God wrestles with us to bring us at last to the truth, to the knowledge of ourselves, to an end of all prevarication and self-deception, all our playing hide-and-seek with conscience, our parrying and fencing with reality, our ostrich-like concealments from the inescapable hunter of our souls;

to bring us at last, if it may be, to face the naked facts about ourselves and our place in God's universe, our weakness, our sinfulness, our utter dependence of body, soul, and estate upon Him. Truer men; and, therefore humbler men, and then also stronger men. God does not wrestle with us merely to break us down, to lay us nerveless and paralyzed at His feet; it is that at last we may come to know Him, and understand that His nature and His name are love, and cling to Him with the prevailing grasp of our unceasing need. Then weakness itself is transformed into strength. It is when Jacob is vanquished by God's wrestling that he first rises to the stature of princely manhood. And it is thus God wrestles with you and me. Whatever cares and crosses, difficulties or sorrows we have, let us interpret them thus. Let us treat them not as mere lashes and scourges and humiliations, but as a mark of that love to which our perfecting is an everlasting necessity, of God's resolve to fill our lives fuller of eternal good, fuller of His perfect steadfast will instead of our own wayward self-will, fuller of His loving, holy spirit instead of our own unloving, unholy dispositions, fuller of His divine strength, fuller of Himself. Let us receive them thus, and we shall bless God for them through endless ages.

And thus God is wrestling with mankind at the present hour. It is the hour of the world's agony, the world's Peniel, and we are all involved in it. I pity the man who is not sensible of that, who can look upon this world-tragedy as a mere spectator, without feeling that here God is touching his own soul, to rebuke, to purify, to emancipate and bless; for it is certain

that when this tribulation passes away it will leave none of us quite the same, but either truer, humbler, stronger men, or else sunk more deeply in the mire of falsehood, more selfish and callous and blindly unspiritual than before.

I feel sure that in this war God is stretching out his hand to lay low some towering falsehoods that have imposed themselves upon the mind of the modern world and have mightily influenced its ideals and its life. Let me say that I am no railer against the modern world, and take no pessimistic view of the age in which we live; it is no worse, in some respects it is better, than any that has gone before it. But it has its own special idolatries. While the whole spiritual history of mankind is a conflict between the heavenly and the earthly in man, between the life that tries to nourish and satisfy itself with *things* and the life that lives by its vision and grasp of eternal truths, that perpetual conflict takes fresh forms from age to age. And the form it has taken in our modern world has been determined by the dazzling material progress which is its characteristic, by that advance in the knowledge of nature and its powers, that human conquest of earth and sea and sky, the story of which seems like a marvellous fairy tale. The world is a far bigger and richer world, a more alluring and intoxicating world, than ever before. And we have fallen under its spell; we have taken this world of things as our portion, we have enthroned man, the modern man, as its lord and king, and this empire of things we have called civilisation. There is nothing we have boasted so loudly of as "our modern civilisation" and the

“progressive spirit” of our age. These are fine mouth-filling phrases, and we have not inquired too anxiously as to what we meant by them. Civilisation of what? Progress to what end?

Yet there are some unsophisticated people who always know what they mean and can tell their meaning in plain words. Some time ago I received a letter, the most extraordinary and the most instructive I have ever received. It was a criticism by a visitor to this city upon a sermon I had preached upon the Supremacy of Jesus Christ; and although it was evident that the writer had not heard the sermon, the criticism was none the less genuine and sincere. “Jesus Christ,” said the writer. “What did Jesus Christ ever do for mankind? What did he ever do to lighten the burden of human toil by the invention of labour-saving machinery?” There you have the baldest, crudest, but the most succinct and sincere expression of a point of view which has largely dominated the modern world and by which we are all apt to be unconsciously influenced. We have thought of civilisation as a great network of inventions wrought out by human ingenuity to lighten the burden of human toil and increase its output; to make travel and transportation easy, to make people richer and healthier and more comfortable. When we think of progress, we think of more railways with faster trains and more luxurious dining-cars, cities with bigger populations and booming trade, with mills and factories, hotels, universities and hospitals, on a more stupendous scale. We silently assume that civilisation has as its components—steam, electricity, telephones, automobiles, villadoms. We expend

our awe and admiration upon mighty engines, leviathan steamships, colossal feats of engineering, incredible ingenuities of mechanism—the works of man's hands; and it is in looking to the arts and sciences, rather than in looking unto God, that we find our most sanguine anticipations of the future. What may not some further discovery, some new way of harnessing nature's power to man's convenience and comfort, do to transform the world?

And what is the presupposed end of this progress? Is it to make man a nobler being than he is? I think I hit the mark when I say that it is to make him a more *comfortable* being. The ideal of a great multitude of people to-day is neither excessive wealth nor riotous living—they know that the millionaire never does get value for his millions, and for the swine-troughs they have no relish—it is just comfort, solid, material comfort. They have come to regard any conditions of life which involve discomfort, not to say privation or pain, as almost the greatest of evils. To have every convenience at one's command, to live, work, eat and sleep comfortably, and to be well provided for the future continuance of these blessings—this is the ideal life. Nor is it necessarily a selfish ideal. Loving comfort ourselves, we wish others to be comfortable also. We do not like to see Lazarus at the gate; it hurts our humane feelings. But it is not too much to say that the real, though unavowed, idea many people have of the Kingdom of God is just the universal diffusion of comfort. When, by the completer annexation of nature and the better organisation of society, every one has a comfortable home to live in

and three comfortable meals a day, the millennium will have arrived.¹

And in a world possessed by such thoughts and ideals God lets loose this devastating whirlwind of war. The irony of it! the awful, loving irony! God is saying to-day: "You shall learn what this unspiritual civilisation, this civilisation of things and not of soul, will do for you. You shall see how a world that has worshipped the comfort of things shall by the very objects of its idolatry be filled with pain and privation, watered with tears and blood. You shall know how such a civilisation defeats itself; how, leaving the heart of life unchanged, it turns its gifts and powers to self-destruction; how in peace it breeds corruption; how in war it can muster not armies but nations, not nations but empires, for mutual slaughter; how it can mine the seas, hurl shells for incredible distances, add to the terrors of war the submarine and the aeroplane, but cannot tame human passion nor restrain its brutalities, cannot teach men the plain wisdom of living at peace and seeking every man his neighbour's good as the condition of his own." In all this is not God wrestling with us? Is he not showing by terrible things in righteousness that an unspiritual civilisation

¹Speaking of the Antonine age of Roman history, Sir Samuel Dill has said: "A society may be humane and kindly while yet it is worldly and materialised. With all its humanitarian sentiment and material glories, the Roman world had entered on that fatal incline which, by an unperceived yet irresistible movement, led on to that sterilisation of the higher intellect and that petrification of society which ended in the catastrophe of the fifth century." Ominous words for our own age, had not Providence intervened.

can work no essential change for the better in human life, that unless it has in it the Breath of God and is governed and guided by truth and love, it is a power for evil more than for good? God send that it be not in vain! Shall we not see and understand, with a new and transforming power of conviction, the everlasting truth that men and nations live by character, by the faith that makes character, by the Christ who inspires that faith? God is wrestling with our souls. Shall we not win the blessing He designs for us and become truer, humbler, stronger men? Shall we not get nearer to the core of reality and learn to live not for the little surface-things, but for the great, the service of love and faithfulness to God and man? Only there can we find rest to our souls; and God is helping us to find it. A few days ago I had read to me part of a letter from a German lady whose brother fell in one of the early engagements of the war: "Our brother has died for his country," the writer said. "Life has suddenly become very simple and very great." That phrase has clung to me—"life has suddenly become very simple and very great." Simple? Yes, for the soldier and for those he leaves behind just one straightforward thing to do, to go all the way with duty, to pay the full price, lay all upon the altar. Very simple, and also how great! The heroic life is always simple and always great, because it is not lost in a maze of things that are of only artificial importance, but is face to face with the supreme things—God, Duty, Life, Death. Many a man in the field to-day and many a woman left at home, who had been fooling life away on the trumpery little

things, have suddenly found it become very simple and very great. And all of us, I think, have felt a little of this. Our hearts have been purified by the fire of a great emotion, an intense feeling of devotion to our country and its righteous cause, of readiness to make whatever sacrifices may be demanded of us, to place our talents, our means, our lives if needed, at the service of the supreme duty of the hour. We have felt an expansion, an elevation, an emancipation of soul. We have been in some measure liberated from the bondage of the petty and unreal. Our little personal anxieties and claims and grievances are forgotten or recede into the background. A great love for our motherland has swept away our petty selfishnesses. Life has become simpler and greater because we are face to face with a great duty and with a call to great sacrifice, and are thrilled by a great and noble emotion.

So far we have proved that we are "noble yet." So far we are nearer to God. But when the crisis is past, as we pray God it soon may be, will life fall back just to the old level, into the multitude of littlenesses out of which we vainly try to make a greatness? Let it not be so. Let us get to God; let us take hold of Him and like Jacob say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." To the Christian life should always be simple and great. He is a citizen of the eternal commonwealth, a servant and soldier of the eternal King. He lives for the interests and serves the cause that are eternal and supreme. He ought to be and may be every day as free from the world as the soldier who faces death on the battlefield. If we

have come to desire this, God has not wrestled with us in vain. "If any man thus thirst," Christ says, "let him come unto Me and drink." He will enlighten our darkness and show us the way and deliver us from ourselves. If He has drawn near to you in this hour of worship, do not let Him go until He bless you.

II

THE LAW OF NON-RESISTANCE

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil (the "evil man," R. V.): but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.—Matt. 5: 38, 39.

¹Is it possible for a man or for a nation to fight with the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ? It may seem late in the day to ask that question; still, it is never too late, it is always timely, to look into the deeper issues of what is in course of action. In this particular case, a study of this passage should be helpful in making plain to us in what spirit we ought to conduct the war, and what final results we ought to desire and seek from it both for ourselves and for our antagonists.

Now here our Lord inculcates in the strongest way the duty of not resisting "the evil man." He demands, or seems to demand, the entire renunciation of self-defence and self-vindication, of standing upon our own rights in any way. The command is absolute; no reason is assigned for it; but though the duty is stated as simply self-evident, we are compelled to

¹It may be well to say that, although this sermon was preached after the outbreak of the war, it only embodies in less technical form the interpretation of the passage which I have given in my class-lectures years before the war loomed up on the horizon.

admit that it is far from being so to the majority of men, or even of Christians. There is no normally constituted person whose conscience does not tell him that it is wrong to steal, wrong also to withhold from a neighbour the help he needs and which it is in one's power to give. When Christ speaks the parable of the Good Samaritan, He speaks to the conscience and the heart of all men; but when He demands that if by high-handed violence one take from you a portion of your clothing you are cheerfully to hand over to him a portion of the remainder, this seems to be an entirely different matter. And when the principle of non-resistance is literally interpreted and carried to its logical issue, as by Tolstoi, who tells you that if you see a brutal man killing a child or abusing a woman, you may plead with him, you may even interpose your body between the assailant and his victim, but one thing you must not do—oppose him by forcible resistance and so “abandon the law you have received from God,” it must be said that such a view of duty is repugnant to the normal moral sense, and that, with few exceptions, men would deny that such a law can be the law of God. And, further, we remember that elsewhere our Lord Himself speaks in a very different strain. Equally authentic, for example, is the passage in which the Preacher of Peace advises him who has not a sword to sell his coat, if need be, in order to procure one. Jesus did not always speak plain truths in the plainest way. He did not spread His gems on the surface to be picked up without trouble, but often hid them deep, so that men might be compelled to seek for them. But He never leaves the seeker without

a clue; and the clue He gives us here is not hard to find and to follow.

He is denouncing retaliation. These words are spoken in passionate repudiation of the vindictive spirit expressed in the old maxim, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. This was the spirit that prevailed in the ancient world, both Jewish and Gentile. The great Roman, Sulla,¹ when from his death-bed he reviewed his career, summed up his good fortune in this, that no man had done more good to his friends, and more harm to his enemies. The Jewish character also had a dark, revengeful strain in it, as some even of the Old Testament Scriptures, like the book of Esther and certain of the Psalms, remain to show. Now this spirit Jesus utterly condemns. He can find no words too strong to express His abhorrence of it. He sees in its removal, or, let us rather say, in its *reversal* a distinctive feature of the new spirit He had come to create in the world. And so true is this in fact, and so much has it impressed mankind, that still when we speak of any one as acting "in a Christian spirit," we mean that he has displayed in some signal way the power of forgiving injuries.

Now, why is retaliation wrong? Often men do not feel retaliation to be a crime; on the contrary they often feel it to be emphatically right. You have heard men, and men who were not altogether bad, make it their boast that they generally manage to "get even" with those who trespass upon their rights. You have perhaps known men with whom this principle of

¹I owe the illustration to *Ecce Homo*.

“getting even” has become a passion and an obsession, men who will wait and silently bide their time for years, until the moment comes when they can exact an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. And so far from exciting a feeling of shame, this makes them glow with honest pride and self-applause. It appeals to something in man which is real and not altogether bad. It gives a satisfaction of a kind, though a poor and false kind, to one’s self-respect. The person who carelessly or maliciously injures me depreciates my personal worth; he treats me as a person of no consequence, who is weak and defenceless or pusillanimous and tame-spirited, and whose rights need not be scrupulously regarded. Consequently, if I do not retaliate, I seem to indorse this humiliating estimate of myself: while what I naturally desire is to correct it as speedily and drastically as possible.

It is here that the crucial difficulty of Christ’s law of forgiveness and non-retaliation lies. To submit to injury without effective protest is felt to be weakness, a letting down of the proper dignity of one’s manhood. But the Light of the world has shone in vain, the Cross of Christ is made of none effect, unless we are able to apprehend the utter falsity of this. Weakness—to be inflamed with resentment, that is weakness. Humiliation—to be so influenced by men as to repeat their injurious conduct, that is humiliation. Strength—to refuse to do wrong because another has done wrong, that is strength. To realize that no man can really hurt you—hurt your soul—unless he can make you hate him, that is self-respect and self-vindication. It is *moral sovereignty*. “Forgiving

one another," says St. Paul, "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." To forgive "even as God," this is the reproduction, the exercise by each in his own individual kingdom, of God's own prerogative and power. It is to do what God does; to be what God is.

On the contrary, think what is the state of the merely revengeful man. His revenge has no other end than self-gratification; and the gratification it aims at consists only in the infliction of suffering upon another. He finds his pleasure in another's pain; his joy in another's grief; his triumph in another's humiliation; which is surely the most devilish state of soul in which it is possible for a human being to exist. There are optical glasses through which objects are seen upside down; and it is through such glasses that a man's soul looks when he exults in "getting even" with one who does him a wrong. You "get even" with him; that is exactly what you do. You get even—by descending to his level. Christ bids you get even in the opposite fashion, by rising above him and then helping him to rise with you to the higher plane.

For observe next, that He does not merely forbid retaliation, but enjoins its opposite. He preaches no mere passive submission to evil; He preaches retaliation, but of an opposite kind from the world's—to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, give one's cloak also. Mere passive submission may be weakness, cowardice, or phlegmatic indifference; it may only prove that, like Hamlet, one is "pigeon-livered, and lacks gall to make oppression bitter." The Christian's attitude is to be active, militant; he is to carry the war

into the enemy's camp, to prove that love is stronger than hate, generosity than greed, kindness than unkindness; to overcome evil with good. The world had always tried to overcome evil by retaliation. Before Christ came it knew scarcely another way of treating evil than by retribution and reprisal. And it was a dead failure. It always must be. The only effect of retaliation is to multiply the amount of evil in the world. It is the means by which strife breeds ever fresh strife, and wrong fresh wrong; a kind of diabolical tennis-match in which the ball of injury and hate is hurled to and fro, and which but for the limitations of human life and resource would continue to the end of time, filling the earth with the ever-increasing reverberations of enmity and violence. Revengefulness is a complete failure for the overcoming of evil. It may punish and even crush the evil-doer; but it does not conquer him, does not eradicate the evil principle from his heart, but rather plants it more stubbornly there; it does not make him ashamed of his sin, does not win him to God and good. Love often does, and it is the only power that can. Let love unite your soul with your fellow's in bearing the burden of his wrong, and there is always the probability that his soul will respond and unite itself with yours in repentance. That is the amazing truth revealed to the world in the Gospel of Christ. For the clenched fist it substituted the pierced hand. When we smote God on the one cheek by our sin, He turned to us the other also on the Cross. This is the power God relies on to change men's hearts, and to set up His Throne of Love within us. And this is the power He bids us rely on too. It may seem

foolish when love steps into the arena to "fetter madness with a silken thread"; but it is the foolishness of God, which is wiser than men. Love may fail—we have no guarantee that it will always succeed—but we must take the risk of ingratitude and insensibility, as God does.

It comes to this, then, that, positively, these precepts of Christ indicate a special *method* of applying the universal principle of Love. And Love must teach us how to obey them. It would be easy by a mechanical interpretation to push them to practical absurdity. By giving liberally to every able-bodied beggar who asks an alms, would we be acting for the best interests of society, or of the able-bodied beggar himself? Would a merchant whose shop-boy is caught purloining from the till be well-advised in promoting him to be cashier and giving him the key of the safe? But, though it is easy to ask such questions, we must on no account minimize the force of Christ's *principle*. That principle is excellently stated in the words of Bishop Gore: "So far as our personal feeling goes, we ought always to be ready to turn the other cheek, to give without desire or hope of receiving again. *Love knows no limits but those which love itself imposes. When love resists or refuses, it must be because compliance would be a violation of love.*"

And so we come to the next great question—will love ever so resist and refuse? Is the turning of the other cheek not only one method, is it the only method by which wise and enlightened love will act in seeking the highest good of men and society? Are we to take these precepts of Christ as prescribing an

invariable course of action in all circumstances? Or ought we to understand them as enjoining a spirit which will seek its end by this, but also, it may be, by other methods, according to circumstances?

We see at once that this is a question of the first magnitude. Literally construed, our Lord's precepts have only an individual reference; they prescribe the duty of one person face to face with another person; they do not lay down any rule of conduct where the rights and interests of a third party are concerned. Those who find in them a prohibition of all forcible resistance to evil, as for example defensive war, in order to do so are compelled to lay aside the canon of literal interpretation. They assume that a society, a nation, has a social or national personality which can act and is bound to act in the same way as the individual. In other words they assume that according to the teaching of Christ, love requires of us the willingness to sacrifice not only our own interests but the interests of others also; that I am not only to turn my own cheek to the smiter but to stand by, passive, forbidden to use more than verbal pleading and protest, when I see others smitten and robbed. Now, without arguing for the present whether this is or is not what love requires, let me point out the vastness of the issue raised. The question of war is a very small part of it. If it be true that love has only one method of dealing with evil, the method of voluntary submission, and indeed of offering oneself a victim to redoubled injury; if it be true that love forbids all use of physical means of correction and compulsion, this goes down to the foundation of all things, and affects the

moral principle of all government, human and divine. It would declare everything in the nature of punishment, all enforcement of law, to be immoral. It would begin at the family. It would mean that no parent who truly loves his child could in any circumstances inflict punishment or use his power to enforce the law of the home; and even if one member of the household should injure and tyrannise over another, could never interfere between the tyrant and his victim except by tearful pleading and "moral suasion."¹

And if this were love's only method of dealing with evil, it would follow that the State has no moral right to impose its laws, that all punishment of crime, all means used to protect peaceable and unoffending persons against lawless aggression are immoral; in short, that the police-force and our courts of justice are the embodiment of a wholly unchristian and immoral conception of society. So the Christian anarchist contends. But, as I have said, he assumes that the law of Christ not only requires of us the willing surrender of our own rights and interests whenever the ends of love will be promoted by our so doing, but requires of us also the sacrifice of the rights and interests of others. To represent this as the teaching of Jesus is quite unwarrantable. The State is trustee for the people; it exists to protect their rights

¹A notable fallacy often lurks in the use of this term, "moral suasion." It is assumed that *verbal* suasion is moral, which is not by any means always the case; and that suasion by *physical* means is non-moral, which also is far from being the case. My recollection of my boyhood is that physical correction led swiftly to moral effects, as it was intended to do.

and liberties. Here too the law of Christ, of course, forbids the revengeful spirit. All the barbarous and ferocious punishments of former times, the unmentionable horrors, which served no other end than the glutting of the savage appetite for cruelty, have, under the influence of Christianity, fallen into blessed desuetude; and the conviction steadily grows that even for the protection of society the most effective kind of penal treatment is that which aims at the reformation of the offender. But that Jesus ever contemplated the handing over of society to the mercy of the criminal, or of whosoever has the anti-social instincts most strongly developed—has most of the devil in him—I do not find the least hint in any word or deed of Jesus Christ.

But all goes back to this: How does God, who is love, govern in His Kingdom? This, which is the crucial point of the whole inquiry, is singularly lost sight of by many. Christ bids us be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. He constantly illustrates the moral nature of God and the principles of divine action by their human analogies. It is absolutely fundamental to the whole teaching of Jesus that man's moral nature is the image of God's. Human love and divine love, human righteousness and divine righteousness, are the same in content and character. What is right in God is right also in man, and what is wrong in man would be wrong also in God. If this were not so, no real fellowship in spirit and in truth could ever be possible between God and man. How then does God govern in his Kingdom? Jesus Christ has taught us the amazing truth, that God's chosen and supreme

method of meeting evil is the method of suffering, self-sacrificing love, the method of the Cross. But is this His sole method? Has He no others which He uses as auxiliary to this, or which, in the temporary or ultimate failure of this, He is constrained to employ in its place? There is no room for hesitation in saying what answer Jesus Christ gave to that question. God is the Father of spirits and seeks always to win us and rule us by truth and grace; but nowhere else in the Bible, Old Testament or New, is that fact set more clearly side by side with this, that God is also the Almighty Judge and Ruler of the universe, and that He meets evil with physical antagonisms, corrections and compulsions, administered and directed for moral ends. Whom He loveth He chasteneth. Those who are obstinately evil He punishes, punishes here and will punish hereafter. By His very love, God is bound to antagonise wrong. His love requires that right shall be rewarded and wrong punished; this, indeed, is inherent in the very constitution of a universe created and ordered by love. And if God in His government act thus, it follows that earthly governments in their lower sphere, and, indeed, that each of us, in so far as he is a trustee of the moral order, must do likewise.

We come lastly to the question of *war*. And it is very obvious that in an ideal world, a really Christian world, just as little as there could be either policeman or magistrate, could there be international warfare; and with the faith Christianity inspires regarding the future of humanity, it is not extravagant to look forward to a time when they shall all have become obsolete

together. As we look back with some astonishment to a time when it was thought that questions of honour, as between man and man, could be settled only by mortal combat, so a time will come when men shall look back with the same uncomprehending amazement to the dark ages in which nations put to the arbitrament of the sword questions which reason and conscience should judge and decide. Even as a result of the present unparalleled conflict we may hope that everywhere the eyes of men will be opened to the sheer stupidity, as well as the criminality, of war; when the whole civilised world will be united against war, and one nation shall no more dare to wage aggressive war against another nation without the certainty of punishment, than a man in this country can at present attempt to force the fighting of a duel upon his neighbour without being locked up for breach of the peace. But we have to deal with the world as it is. And that the law of love, the teaching of Jesus, intends that the nations of the world shall be at the mercy of whichever of them is most selfish and conscienceless, or that all armed resistance to aggression and tyranny, and all armed defence of a nation's life and liberty is wrong, I can find no ground at all for believing.

In the world we of this generation are dwelling in, there is only one really militaristic nation, only one which proudly avows itself to be a war-state, which believes that war is a nation's business by which it grows strong and wealthy and morally great, and which therefore organises its whole national life for war. And assuredly it is not the will of God that such a nation with such ideals, the ideals of the pirate and

the cut-throat, should dominate the world; and assuredly it is the will of God that, when the conflict is forced upon us, we should do everything and suffer everything to prevent this. The government of a country would do as great wrong if it sacrificed the rights and liberties of its subjects to such a nation as by sacrificing them to the criminal or the madman. And to say that the soldier in such a cause is a man who hires himself to kill is claptrap of the worst kind. As well say that a surgeon is a man who hires himself to wound, or that the judge hires himself to hang the murderer!

There is one kind of war, and only one, which the law of love will sanction, and not only sanction but enjoin—war which is a weapon of righteousness to prevent or to redress foul international wrong; war for the sake of peace based on righteousness, its only foundation, not for extension of territory; for the punishment of evil-doers, not for the conquest of rivals in power; for the establishment of freedom, for the protection of the weak and innocent, not for oppression and the sating of ruthless ambition. Such is the war we are now waging. Let us wage it in a Christian spirit of firm dependence upon God, who has laid this terrible task upon us; and without malice toward the foe. In war as in all else, the one thing the teaching of Christ forbids and the spirit of Christ excludes is hate, a vindictive disposition which exults and gloats over the suffering and disaster of others. It is the melancholy necessity of the case that we can establish the right only by inflicting defeat and immediate disaster upon our adversary. It is a

tragic business altogether; yet the tragic duty has to be performed, just as we have to fight against the hallucinated fury of a maniac. But we must have the courage, and maintain it, not to return hate for hate. Soldiers at the front are too busy for hate; it is the civilians at home, as has been truly said, waiting and fretting, who are most tempted to hate. But the cause we fight for is an ideal which is sullied by every hateful or savage thought. It would not be worth fighting for if it were the cause of hate, if its object were revenge. It is because it is not, and because all the world sees it is not, that the world's moral sympathies are with us.

And notwithstanding all that is happening in this distracted world, and in this year of the Christian era, let not the hope fail us that God will give increasingly to mankind that divine spirit which came in Jesus Christ to restore the world, that the healing stream of love which flows from His Cross will yet turn the wilderness made by human blindness and passion into a garden of the Lord, and the new day dawn when strife and sin shall

Pass with the stars, and leave us with the sun.

III

THE LAW OF STEWARDSHIP

And his lord commended the unrighteous steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their own generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.—St. Luke 16: 8, 9. (R. V.)

The account of an ingenious and successful swindle, such as Our Lord gives here, seems a strange source from which to derive any principle of heavenly wisdom. But it is always permissible to learn some good lesson from evil men. We may admire and learn from the courage of a brigand or the ingenuity of a forger or the skilful navigation of a pirate. We may detach the quality from the man and from the unworthy purpose to which he devotes it, and looking at the quality by itself we may receive instruction from it and be stimulated to imitation. It is with this purpose that our Lord here relates the singularly interesting story of a very sagacious though unscrupulous man.

A certain rich man has a steward, an agent or factor, whom he has intrusted with the administration of his estate; and having reason to suspect the steward of abusing his trust, he gives him notice of dismissal and bids him prepare an account of his stewardship. By this unexpected turn of events the steward finds himself brought face to face with a most discouraging

prospect. As he well knows, he cannot render a satisfactory account; the loss of his situation is inevitable, and he is like to be cast upon the world with a discredited character and with slender chance of ever again being employed in any position of trust. What is to become of him? Dig he cannot; a life of ease has unfitted him for hard manual toil, and from what is apparently the only alternative to this, beggary, he recoils in shame. But he does not despair. He applies his active and resourceful mind to the solution of his problem; and soon he sees light at the end of the tunnel. I have it, he exclaims with intense satisfaction, I am resolved what to do. The plan he evolves seems to be of this nature. He has still one collection of rents to make before his dismissal takes effect. The rents consist of a fixed proportion of the produce of the land, and therefore vary in amount from year to year. And when he gathers the tenants together and ascertains from each what is the sum due, as each mentions the amount, he bids him write so much less in the reckoning, for which he then, I suppose, gives him a full discharge. Thus he secures the favour and good offices of the tenants, who, of course, are delighted by this generous regard for their interests. The whole proceeding is cynically dishonest; but it displays an admirable shrewdness. The steward virtually steals his master's money; but he does not, as a clumsier rogue would, abscond with it or squander it in a final bout of revelry. ("Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"). He *invests* it, and he invests it where no legal writ can reach it, invests it in friendship; turns it into a moral equivalent, gratitude. He

uses it to put a number of men under obligation to him, and he calculates that when he is turned adrift the friendship of these men will be to him a haven of refuge. It will stand him in good stead; they will palliate his misdemeanours and magnify his virtues; they will say that, whatever his faults, he was a kindly, generous soul, always ready to do a poor man a good turn, and that the days of his stewardship were the best they ever had. In the time of his need they will receive him into their houses as an honoured guest, will speak well of him, rehabilitate his character and possibly enable him to take his place in the world again.

"Such," Jesus says to men, "is your position and your opportunity in this world. You are stewards for God; the day of reckoning is nigh; but a day of opportunity is still left you. Use it wisely. Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness."¹

The first truth here, and it is one of the first magnitude, is that life is a stewardship; our position in the world is that of stewards, God's stewards. That means that our right relation to everything we call ours is determined not by the right of possession but by the

¹ "Mammon" is simply the Syriac word for money; but why Our Lord calls it "of unrighteousness" is not quite clear. May it be merely a transference of the imagery of the Parable into the interpretation? (Your worldly possessions are in your case the parallel of the money which the steward in the story obtained so dishonestly but used so wisely.) More probably "unrighteous" here means merely "worldly" or "secular." The one point of absolute certainty is that the meaning is not that ill-gotten gain may be sanctified by being put to charitable uses.

duty of *administration*. The steward is not the proprietor. The entire management of the estate is committed to him, and to outsiders he may have very much the appearance of being the proprietor; but he fatally deceives himself if he ever forget that all that is in his hands belongs to another and is his only to administer, and to administer not according to his own fancy or for his own pleasure, but according to the will and for the purposes of that other. This is a truth about human life Our Lord is never weary of reiterating. His parables of the Talents and the Pounds, of the Unjust Steward with its companion picture of the Rich Man and Lazarus, all tell the same story. In human life there is no such thing as absolute proprietorship. There is relative proprietorship: there are those things on which we can lay our hands with the right of indubitable ownership, while we say to others, "Hands off!" Without such right of ownership it is evident that there could be no possibility of stewardship—to abolish the rights of property were at the same time to abrogate its duties—yet all the time what we legitimately claim as our own against rival claimants is not ours, but is absolutely another's. The administration only is ours. Begin at the foundation of things, with life itself, the mere fact of our active and rational existence: even this being we call our own is not our own. We did not create it or earn it; it is not ours by any right of conquest or discovery. We have none of those prior rights to it in virtue of which men call things their own. Our thought of stewardship must begin with this primal fact—It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. God does

not come into our lives claiming our allegiance. God made me, *made* me. To him, moment by moment, I am indebted for my very existence. Absolutely it is His; it is mine only as a trust, a stewardship, an office rather than a possession. Life and all that life brings, powers of body and capacities of mind, all its possessions outward and inward, the Gospel of Christ and the grace of God, all spiritual knowledge, wisdom, sympathy, joy, are ours only to administer.

And this administration, we are further reminded, is *temporary*. Our life is merely a situation; our position that of a servant who is in daily dependence on his master's bidding to stay or go. And in the end, of necessity, stewardship is an office of *responsibility*. Swiftly, day by day, we are travelling on to the unknown but appointed time when a hand will be laid on our shoulder and a voice will say in our ear, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward. It is this that gives our fleeting life its enduring significance, that makes it "solemn and majestic as the portals of Eternity." It is this that makes us men. Our term on earth is brief; each of us is but a drop in the great ocean of humanity. In a few years the place that knew us shall know us no more. We shall be of the innumerable and forgotten generations whose

Place in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills
Is that their graves are green.

What importance then can attach to our conduct? In the end, can it matter much what use we make of those swift years which are "as a wind that passeth

and that cometh not again"? The answer to such questions is that life is stewardship, and that stewardship is essentially a responsibility. Our books must be given up for the final audit. Without this, life would be meaningless, a race without a goal, a drama without a *dénouement*. Materialism may declare that all began in slush and slime and that all will return in the revolution of the Eternal Wheel to slush and slime again; but the human heart has never believed it. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, saith the Lord: that is the note to which our moral instincts respond. We are responsible, and it is by the way in which we fulfil our Master's purpose now that we must stand or fall at last. And we know what that involves. Well we know that we are unable to meet our liabilities; and that our one hope must be that, since we cannot answer God as our Judge, we can, and humbly do, flee to him as our Saviour and cast ourselves upon the same rich mercy that opened the Kingdom of Heaven to the Thief on the Cross. But is stewardship abolished when we cast our bankrupt lives before the Throne of Grace? Nay, it only then makes a hopeful and effective beginning. The parable of the Prodigal Son is not the whole Gospel. We must read on. The pardoned prodigal who had wasted his father's goods becomes the most faithful of stewards. The law of stewardship never changes, the law of moral continuity by which the life here is carried forward and bears its fruit in the greater life to come; but when life is inspired by the faith and the hope and the love Christ brings, this law becomes our blessing and our hope.

And in this parable Our Lord teaches in a wonderfully simple and beautiful manner, how this is possible. He is speaking directly of the stewardship of money. "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness." The steward in the parable was quick to see that this was the policy of wisdom: not to use up his remaining day of opportunity in high carousal, nor to bury the money coming into his hands in order afterwards to dig it up again, but to lay it out in making friends against the time to come. "Such," Jesus says to men, "is your position in this world. You are still stewards; the day of opportunity still is yours. Make to yourselves friends. Be assured of this, that the most profitable of all investments of your money is to *make friends* by means of it, to make it earn the love and gratitude of your fellowmen."

In this advice there is nothing strange; this is everywhere inculcated in the Bible, Old Testament as well as New. But the reason given for it, the method by which Our Lord here indicates that material riches may be transferred to the eternal world and transmuted into "treasure in heaven," is unique. "That when it fails," just as the beneficiaries of the unjust steward received him into their houses, so "they," the friends you have made, may receive you into "eternal habitations." "That when it fails." It will fail. The time will come when your material possessions will avail you no more than a sackful of gold does a drowning man, and gossips will ask not how much you possess, but how much did you leave? What then? Have earthly possessions no significance for the real purposes of a man's

life? or are they but clogs and encumbrances that make the strait gate straiter still? Not so, Christ says. They may be spiritualised, immortalised. There are immortal objects on which you may spend your transitory riches, not houses or lands but your fellow-immortals. You may use them so that when you go into that other world you shall not enter it as strangers and friendless, but shall find those whom you have made to share in your good things here waiting to receive you with welcoming arms and friendly countenances into the everlasting habitations.

This is a beautiful thought with regard to the world to come, and doubtless a beautiful fact too. The conception of the good results in the eternal world which naturally follow good stewardship here is put in parabolic language, to which, however, a literal interpretation need not be denied. There, in that other world, as one by one we are gathered into it, we shall meet with those to whom we have shown Christ's love on earth. The parents whose declining years you have sheltered and comforted, at the expense perhaps of some of youth's opportunities and enjoyments; the dear ones for whom you have toiled and watched and suffered; the hungry or the sick whose pain your charity has eased; the struggling brother to whom you have held out a helping hand; the heathen man or woman at the other side of the world to whom you have sent the messenger of Christ; the famished Belgian or Servian to whom among the smoking ruins of their land you have sent relief; all whom you have loved and blessed in the Spirit of Christ—in these you have laid up "treasure in heaven," with these you have

formed immortal ties which will enrich and ennoble your life hereafter. In the everlasting habitations there may be those who are uttering your names with benediction, who are praying for you and waiting for you, leaning over the ramparts of the City of God as they beckon to you, crying for you to come that they and you may be made perfect together.

And then, if this parable shows how men may be eternally the better and happier for the use they make of this world's goods, the other which immediately follows, that of the rich man and Lazarus, shows how they may be eternally the worse. The connection between the two parables is unmistakable. The condemnation of the rich man is simply bad stewardship. He has not invested his money well. He has invested it in purple and fine linen and sumptuous banquets, instead of in Lazarus. Nothing else is laid to his charge than this, that while he was living in mirth and splendour every day Lazarus was lying in unrelieved misery at his gate. Therefore, according to that awful parable, he finds himself in hell, Lazarus being the witness of his abused stewardship. Everywhere in the teaching of Jesus we find this inevitable law of retribution. The golden rule becomes more than golden; it reaches up to God and on into eternity: Do ye unto men as ye would that God should do unto you.

This parable is primarily concerned with the use of money, and addresses more immediately those who are well furnished with this world's goods. It need scarcely be said, however, that its principle applies to every capacity for service with which God has intrusted us. "As every man hath received the gift,

even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The wise must help the ignorant; we must put our knowledge and intellectual gifts out in the service of others. The strong man must help the weak, must bear gently with misunderstanding and prejudice, must try to put himself in the place of the irresolute and faint-hearted, and help him over one stile after another, and never grow weary of helping. In such stewardship lies the divine meaning of these inequalities which will always exist in human life. God has made the mountain for the plain and the plain for the mountain; the mountain to catch the rain and snow from heaven and send its streams down into the valley; the plain, thus fertilised, to bring forth "grass for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." Were Christ's great truth of stewardship adequately understood and practised, it would produce the greatest revolution the world has ever seen, the only revolution that can save society. If only all men, or even a majority, conceived themselves not as owners but as stewards of the gifts of nature, of fortune and of grace, think how this would solve all our problems! In the Church, so full as it is of wealth, ability, and culture, what financial demands would not be easily met, what difficulty in obtaining competent persons to carry on the Church's work among the young, the churchless, in the field of home and foreign missions, would not be triumphantly overcome? Such difficulties would not exist. In the State, instead of the

office-seeker or the man who has an axe of his own to grind, we should find, far oftener than we do, the most high-minded and competent citizens ready to shoulder the burden of public affairs; those who in other directions have proved their power, showing their will, even at large personal sacrifice, to serve the community. In the world of industry and business, we should find the man of commercial genius and administrative ability regarding himself as an organiser not as an exploiter of other men's labour, as a true captain of industry, to whom self-enrichment, if it come, will come as a by-product, not as the deliberate and dominating aim of his career. Christian men, men of conscience, whether Christian or not, would regard the unearned profit with suspicion; they would fight shy of it, instead of scenting it from afar and pouncing upon it with hurried flight, like the vulture upon the carrion. We should hear no more of men who having made an apparently honest contract, as the first step to its fulfilment, walk to the nearest hotel and divide amongst themselves a million-dollar "rake-off," then tell the tale with imperturbable effrontery because they tell it, as they know, to millions who will hear it with only a sigh of envy.

This grand doctrine of Jesus Christ, this interpretation of life as stewardship, opens up the largest regions of thought and motive. It contains all the truth there is in Socialism and none of its falsehoods. And it has heights and depths of which Socialism does not dream. It has such *depths*. It demands of us surrenders, sacrifices, the enforcement of which by political power or socialistic programme we should

justly resent. An old French admiral, famous for his loyalty, took as his device a flaming oar with the singular device: "For another? No!" He meant that he was ready to do or dare or suffer for his King what he would not for any other. Even so, for Christ, as members of the absolute Divine Kingdom, in obedience to that highest imperative which "demands my life, my soul, my all" we shall be ready to do what no lower authority has the right to bid us do, give what no human power has the right to demand, forgive what no man has the right to inflict. For another? No! For Christ? Yes! And this truth of stewardship rises to unearthly *heights*. It is one of the most inspiring conceptions in the whole compass of Christian truth. It links earth to heaven, the little now to the great hereafter; shows us how the few and transient things of the present may be made the seed from which shall spring an immortal harvest. My brethren, we may be Christians and yet, be assured, we may enrich or impoverish our heaven. By careless or faithless stewardship, by selfishness or slothfulness, we may stunt our soul's growth and narrow our capacity for entering into the joy of our Lord. But if we are using the much or little committed to us as faithful stewards, investing it in the service of God by the service of our fellowmen, turning it into moral equivalents, the currency of Heaven—then when the world's wealth and fashion are all dead and done with, this will be a crown that fadeth not away, a garment that moth cannot consume, a treasure rust cannot corrupt, a work imperishable and undecaying because it is wrought in God. Make to yourselves friends. Invest

in Christlike welldoing while your brief day of opportunity lasts; for this is the *perfect*¹ love which casteth out fear.

¹That this is the meaning in 1 John 4: 17, 18, I have endeavoured to show in my *Tests of Life*, pp. 285ff.

IV

POLITICS ACCORDING TO CHRIST

And when the ten heard it they were moved with indignation concerning the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him and said, Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you; but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.—Matt. 20: 24-28. (R. V.)

Christianity is not in itself a political system, neither is it wedded to any. It can flourish, and has flourished, under every form of social and political organization. Nevertheless Christianity is a political force, a force which must necessarily influence and in the end determine the organization of community life. It is the greatest of political forces because it is the greatest of spiritual forces, and because it is by spiritual forces and laws that the human world is ultimately governed. And in this passage our Lord lays down the eternal principle of sound politics, first and directly with regard to the ideal kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, and then indirectly concerning the kingdoms of this world. Let us see when and why He was led to do this.

It was within a week of the Crucifixion, and He had been once more announcing to His disciples the over-

whelming tragedy in which His earthly career was destined to end, and which now lay immediately before Him. And then the next thing we read is that two of their number, James and John, are trying to steal a march upon the others in the struggle for honour and precedence in the kingdom of their dreams, seeking to coax their Master into a blindfold promise that they might sit the one on His right hand and the other on His left in the places next the Throne. It was either a very heartless or a very noble thing these young men did. It looks like a piece of heartless selfishness that at the very moment when their Master's soul was so full of the thought of self-sacrifice, they were occupied only with their own interests and ambitions. But I prefer to think that what they did had a noble side to it. There is an old story in Roman history, that once when Rome was closely besieged by the Gauls and there seemed to be little hope of the city's making a successful resistance, the Romans to show their invincible confidence put up to auction the ground on which the enemy were then encamped. And I would wish to think that in a like spirit of heroic faith these disciples saw the clear sky beyond the darkness of the approaching storm—that their petition for thrones just when the Master was pointing to the Cross was, as it were, a vote of confidence, that it amounted to saying: "Lord, thou tellest us of all the dreadful things that are to befall thee; but our faith remains unshaken. Thou art the Christ, the King of Israel, and for our part we covet nothing so much as thy promise, that when thou comest into thy kingdom ours shall be the highest places in thy gift." But

whether the request was more selfish or more noble, it was at any rate entirely foolish and unwarrantable, one which it was impossible for our Lord to consider. And this He now proceeded to show them.

The first thing to be observed is that He does not reject the idea of differences of rank and degrees of greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven. He articulately affirms that in the ideal kingdom no less than in earthly societies, there are places of dignity and power and others of subordination. There is no dead level of equality, either on earth or in heaven, in nature or in grace. Equal rights and opportunities justice assigns to all; and to secure this in ever-growing measure is to-day the aim of all enlightened statesmanship. We want to give all men a better chance, and so far as possible an equal chance, to make the most and best of themselves. But that does not constitute an equality of the "selves"; rather does it tend to bring out more clearly the natural inequalities of men. It is inevitable, and it is the divine purpose, that there shall always be those who, in one way or another, shall exercise power over their fellows; some fitted to be leaders and others to be led; some to be teachers and others to be taught; some with gifts of organization and administration fitted to rule and others to be ruled. In the Kingdom of Heaven, we know, such power over others is wholly spiritual, belonging to the essential nature of things, leaning upon no accidental concurrence of circumstances. There men are governed by their reason, their conscience, their affections. The ideal kingdom is a kingdom of influence, not of violence. And in this respect the kingdoms of

this world shall become, yes, despite all we see in this distracted world, are slowly becoming and shall yet far more become like the Kingdom of God and of His Christ. Men shall govern and be governed by spiritual authority; by reason, not by compulsion, by right, not by might, by love, not by fear. Still, our Lord assumes as a first principle that there will be government, that there will be in the Heavenly Kingdom, as in every kingdom, those who are qualified to exercise a more dominating influence than others, and that the means of doing so—wealth, offices of dignity and power—shall be in the hands of those who are best fitted to use them.

But who are these? That is the question Jesus next answers. These two young men had come to Him with their stupendous request, and, as is evident, they had never spent one serious minute in asking themselves what qualifications they might possess for the lofty positions to which they aspired. Merely as a matter of personal favour and arbitrary patronage, they seemed to think, their Master might, without cost to Himself, bestow these ample and dazzling rewards upon faithful friends and followers like themselves. But with all possible emphasis Jesus repudiates such a notion. In earthly kingdoms it may be so. Disorder and disaster are constantly brought about by the elevation to place and power of incompetent or unscrupulous men, who creep by courtly art or family influence into positions of emolument and power. But it cannot be so in the Divine Kingdom. In it dignity and power are given as the result, not of a Divine partiality, but of a Divine preparation;

and, as our Lord plainly intimates, He could not exalt to the heavenly thrones any whose gifts were unfitted or whose character was unprepared for them.

The disciples' request, you see, was based on a false theory of life, the official theory, that it is the place that makes the man, and not the man that makes the place, great or small, as the case may be. That false theory, how it still blinds men! How men still regard the setting and trappings of life as more than life, position as more than manhood! And it is so transparently false, so silly. Who does not see that to be a king, a dignitary, a millionaire, does not add an inch to a man's real stature, but may only serve as a luminous background against which his intrinsic littleness stands out with crueller clarity? It is not the great platform that makes the orator great; the great orator gives any platform distinction. It is not the title that honours desert, but desert that honours the title; not the task that gives rank to the worker, but the worker who gives rank to the task. The supreme example of this is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. We speak of His redemptive offices. He is the Messiah, the Christ of God; He is Prophet, Priest, and King. One has even heard of His doing this or that in "an official capacity," men thrusting their false theory of life even into the Holy of Holies. The one thing of which there is not vestige or possibility in Jesus Christ is officialism. All is real. It is not His offices that make the Jesus our souls adore; it is Jesus, Jesus only, that makes the offices the divine realities they are. He fills them with Himself. And in His Kingdom, the kingdom of spirit and truth, there are no merely

official dignities. The nearest to Christ in glory and power *can* only be those who are nearest to Him in character and experience, who have drunk most deeply of His cup and been baptised with His baptism. The result will doubtless be very surprising. Many that are first shall be last, and the last first.

And then our Lord answers the question, what it is that qualifies men for positions of power and influence in the heavenly Kingdom, by laying down the fundamental political principle that service is the path to power. He emphasises this law of the ideal commonwealth by contrasting it with the opposite principle which so generally prevails in worldly communities. "The princes of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that are great exercise authority over them." All earthly kingdoms, says Newman, are originally founded on force or fraud. I suppose that is true. The original source of earthly dominion will almost always be found to have been the strong hand. One man wielded a sharper sword or a heavier club than his rivals. One tribe conquered neighbouring tribes in war. Tribute is exacted; lands are annexed; a ruling family is founded, or a lordly caste in whose hands wealth and power and prestige accumulate almost automatically, as the smaller streams become tributaries of the greater. Thus men come to be divided into two classes, one whose birthright it is to rule, another whose birthright is to be ruled; a class whose prerogative it is to be ministered unto, another whose province is to minister. And the point is that in the kingdoms of the world those who are thus ministered unto, who live by the exertions and sacrifices of others,

are accounted as the great and high ; they are the lords of creation, while those who minister unto them are regarded as politically and socially their inferiors. But in the final and perfect Kingdom, Christ tells us, this relation will be precisely reversed. In it also there are those who render service and those who receive it ; but it is those who serve most who also rule, who by universal consent hold the places of dignity and power.

And then it follows that as service is the path to power, so again power is used as opportunity for larger service. "The princes of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority upon them." The words denote a harsh, despotic, disdainful attitude of mind, such as is always apt to be engendered in those who are born or adopted into the traditions of a ruling class and so fall naturally into the error of supposing that the millions exist for the sake of the ruler, not the ruler for the sake of the ruled. But this too must be reversed. "Whosoever of you will be greatest, shall be servant of all." There is a way, Christ says, by which you can compel your fellowmen to become contributory to your advancement and harness themselves to the chariot-wheels of your power and greatness ; but it is not the world's way of struggling upward to outreach and overtop others ; it is my way of stooping in lowliness to help and serve. That is the true meaning of greatness ; that is power. When a man rises in the world, becomes richer, more famous and influential, to the worldly mind that means that there are a larger number of people whom he can bully or pay or somehow induce to do his work for him, or to become subservient to his purposes, to

applaud his performances, to bow down before him, and in general make him *seem* great and glorious. But to the Christian mind, to rise in the scale of power is only to increase the number of persons whom you can serve, or the number of ways in which you can serve them. The poet can serve a larger number of persons, and in a higher way, than the artisan; and the statesman than the cobbler. You take what your fellowmen give you—wealth, influence, leisure from the more sordid tasks of life—but you give it all back, with yourself added to it, in service. That is Christ's conception of how power is to be acquired, and what it means when it is acquired: "For even the Son of Man," the Messiah in the most transcendent conception of Messiahship, "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many."

Now in all this there is no direct teaching regarding the right political constitution of society. What Christ is inculcating is a spirit which may animate the most absolute of autocrats as well as the most unbending champion of democracy. Yet He is dealing here with politics in the deepest way. He is declaring the basis upon which the power of man over man ought to rest and ultimately does rest. It is the will of Christ, it is the policy of His government, that men who have proved their ability and will to achieve not their own affluence or aggrandisement but true social service, should have more power in their hands, more honour and influence, than those who have given no such proof. And although it is the Kingdom of Heaven Christ is here speaking of, it is certain that the more closely the kingdoms of this world approximate to the ideal King-

dom in their practice, the more they will prosper, and that the future of the world lies with those nations which succeed in securing the largest measure of political power and social influence for those who show the largest capacity and the most earnest will to serve their fellowmen.

Let us look a minute or two longer at this great political truth which Christ reveals at the heart of His Gospel, that *service is the path to power and power the path to larger service*. This is no arbitrary law superimposed for moral ends upon the nature of things. It is ultimate, insuppressible truth. There are two great reasons why it must be so. The first lies in man's own nature. Service is necessarily the path to power because it is the one way to the making of a powerful man. Power is not an external thing which you can put on and wear like a uniform. Power is a vital thing, within a man; a quality of the mind, the heart, the will; an ability to see and think and feel, to do and suffer. And there is no possible way of gaining power but by bearing the yoke of service. Only as the talent is faithfully used does the vital capital increase. Only by service does the will acquire that steady firmness by which others are swayed. It is by service that a man becomes a really bigger, more potent personality, that his nature is enlarged and strengthened, that character is braced and disciplined. It is service that issues in true nobility and power.

The second reason is that men are most potently governed by their higher affections, by reverence, admiration, and love, and therefore by those who serve them. The whole faith of Christianity hinges upon

this, that love is the mightiest power in the universe, that God is love, and that all moral beings are in the end influenced and governed by love rather than by fear. God, the God revealed in Christ, ventures all upon the power of love. He stakes His Divine Kingdom, His redemptive government of the universe upon the supremacy of love. It is by the Blood of the Cross, as St. Paul saw, that He will reconcile all things unto Himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven. If He use force, as He does, it is as auxiliary to love; it is force demanded and applied by love. Love is not limited, as some would have us believe, to the one method of gentleness and meek submission. The pierced Hand may wield the chastening rod, yea, the rod of iron upon the rebellious, piercing itself anew with every blow it inflicts; yet, if He wrestle with us like the angel at Peniel, until He break us down and seem to be the worst enemy we have, it is only that like Jacob we may discover in our antagonist Him whose nature and whose name is Love. Love is God's most royal, conquering power. By infinite patience, sympathy, and forgiveness shall wrong be overcome. And with His sure intuition of eternal truth Jesus sees, and here proclaims, that the only true royalty is that of loving service, the highest royalty that of the supreme sacrifice. The Son of Man, the King of Glory, whose dominion is founded in the everlasting nature of things, is He who comes not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. This is the political principle of the Kingdom of Heaven. There is a throne in your heart and mine, and on that throne is Jesus Christ. And why?

Because that throne is the throne of love, and because He has won that throne, because He has served us above all other serving, in that awful uttermost ministry whereby He has met us in our greatest need. It is upon this He is building His immortal empire; it is for this we bow before Him in unutterable adoration.

Here then is the basal political principle, upon which men and nations must act if they would acquire the enduring reality and not the empty phantom of power: men are governed by love; the path to power is service; the true rulers of the world must ever be those men and those peoples that show most of the will and the capacity to serve.

That is the Christian ideal, and, while all the nations have come short of it, it is because one of them has adopted the opposite ideal that the world is plunged into this devastating strife. Germany stands deliberately to-day as the incarnation of government by fear. Her aim has been to make herself formidable, to inspire terror and, in the words of her prophet, Nietzsche, to "live dangerously." What we are fighting is really a creed in arms, a philosophy, a theory of life that has poisoned the wells of German civilisation. Germany has been in the past one of the great servant-nations. The people that gave us Bach and Beethoven, Goethe, Kant, Schleiermacher, and all the host of scholars and scientists whose marvellously patient and unselfish labours have so enriched the world, the Germany that produced such men and regarded them as its national heroes, we can never cease to reverence. But modern Germany has gone after false gods. A philosophy of life that is aggressively anti-Christian

has been ardently embraced, in all its practical consequences at least, by the Prussian war-lords and has filtered down into the minds of the multitude. The divine doctrine of love, the Christian ideals of pity, service, and self-sacrifice, it proclaims to be the greatest of delusions, and the most fatal of hindrances to human progress, a slave-religion devised by the weak and helpless for their own protection. Men are to deny the will to serve and to assert the will to power. Pity is not humanity, but a crime against humanity. The great man is not he who is in sympathy with his fellows, but the ruthless man who can inflict the greatest suffering without heeding the cries of his victim. Men are governed by fear—that is the creed of German militarism, and one result already secured by the war is the damnation of this creed by facts. ¹Why is it that in all the civilised world Germany has not an ally except the Turk, that not one nation has lifted up a voice on her behalf? It is because Germany has chosen to live dangerously. Why is it that all her calculations have gone awry? Why is it that Belgium refused her passage? that the revolt in India and Egypt and South Africa she counted upon practically failed to happen? that on the contrary the Boers and the people of India have so splendidly rallied to the aid of the Motherland? Because they knew how the military potentates of Germany lord it over Germans themselves, and what the German doctrine of ruthlessness means for the weaker nations. Why is it that the

¹This sermon was preached in the early days of the war, before Bulgaria had joined the Turco-Teutonic alliance.

Allies are so utterly resolved to fight this war to their last breath? It is because Germany has made herself to be so much feared by all peace-loving, freedom-loving men, because her victory would rivet upon Europe the chains of a military despotism the most crushing the world has ever seen. Germany has trusted in the power of fear; and already she knows, when she sees the whole world in moral alliance against her, and contrasts with her own friendless condition the marvellous unity of our Empire, an empire held together by little else than the silken cords of love—she knows, or at least must learn, that Christ's is the eternal truth and that antichrist is doomed.

But while it is true that Germany has chosen to stand for the falsehood of the magisterial principle, that power belongs to the "mailed fist" and to the nation that "lives dangerously," can we with truth say that our own Empire stands for the truth of the ministerial principle, that the source of power is service? There is nothing in our record of which we can speak boastfully; there is many a blot upon it; yet in this thing, we may humbly say, lies Britain's truest title to greatness. She has served humanity as no other people has been privileged to do. Far indeed from having attained to the Christian ideal of empire, either at home or abroad, yet more and more consciously and resolutely Britain has set her face toward that ideal. To whichever of her dependencies you look—India, Egypt, the Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria—you find her coming, not to steal and to kill and destroy, but to bring life more abundantly; not to enslave but to liberate; to bring out of confusion, order; instead of oppres-

sion, justice; instead of danger and fear, security; to shepherd her many flocks in the path of material and moral progress. To this noble task she has devoted the flower of her manhood. And when I think how at home and in her colonies the British nation, with all its slowness of movement, has been seeking to follow the higher ideals of national life, the amelioration of the lot of the weak and poor, the more equal distribution of opportunity to all, as well as what it has done and is doing abroad to impart the blessings of civilisation and Christianity to the more backward races, I cannot but claim that with all its defects and failures, our Empire is the most widely beneficent of all secular institutions in the world to-day. And I am filled with humble confidence for the future. Britain's sun cannot set till Britain's work is done; and God has yet a great work for us to do. And if we are obedient to His call, if ours be the will to serve, if we baptise our gifts in the spirit of Christ, He will not remove us from our place, but will still lead us in the van of the nations, and still lay upon us "the white man's burden," the spiritual leadership of the world. Firmly trusting in Him whose work we are here to do, let us be strong and of a good courage while we take up the awful burden of our present cross, the

Arduous strife, the eternal law
To which the triumph of all good is given.

V

WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—Matt. 27: 46.

This is one of those passages of scripture which a preacher approaches with a diffidence amounting almost to reluctance. For preacher and hearers alike one feels that it requires that peculiarly devotional atmosphere we breathe when we are gathered, as now, around the Lord's Table. On the other hand, this word from the Cross is a revelation so unique and amazing of the inner experience of our Lord that it not only deserves but demands our most reverential study, even though the result be to make us feel that here we stand upon the verge of an inscrutable abyss, or can enter only a little way into the shallows near the shore.

From the hour of noon, we are told, and for three hours thereafter, a great darkness came down upon Calvary and the surrounding country. Now, in the Gospels, the history of these three hours is a complete silence. It would seem as if the pall of gloom which turned midday to midnight arrested all movement and held men rooted to the spot where they stood. All the babel of voices which had surged around the Cross, all the chatter and the laughter,

suddenly died on the lips of the mockers. All was still, soundless as the grave. And there, in the heart of that solitude, curtained in from all the world, alone, Jesus hung for three hours of mortal agony upon the Cross. And how grateful, as we might think, must that solitude have been to Him. Now, like a dying man who has bidden farewell to the world and turns his face to the wall to await his summons, now might Jesus forget friend and foe alike and be alone with God, to strengthen and comfort Himself in his Father. But what is our amazement and almost our dismay to discover that with Him it is midnight within as well as without, and that the one voice which breaks that unearthly silence is the cry of the soul in conflict with despair: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Now, this is neither the time nor the place for discussion, though these words have been the subject of much discussion, both theological and psychological. But, pondering over them, this is how the matter appears to me. In the physical sciences we reach certain conceptions which are called "absolutes," points beyond which physical possibilities cannot go. Thus for example the absolute zero of temperature is the point (imaginary, of course) beyond which there cannot be an intenser cold, which is the limit of natural possibility in that direction. And one feels intuitively that in this cry of desolation from the lips of Jesus Christ we reach certain limits of what is possible in spiritual experience.

First we reach the absolute of *suffering*. For great as is the capacity of the body for suffering, it is

exceeded by that of the mind. A flood of mental anguish will sometimes obliterate the consciousness even of acute physical pain. Under the blow of great disaster or bereavement all other sensations are swallowed up in the one agony of soul. And of all kinds of mental suffering the most intense is that which religion itself is capable of producing. Religion, which can shed the light of purest and most rapturous joy upon the soul, can also fill it with the dreariest and gloomiest distress, distress that for the time is unrelieved and inconsolable. If it can make a heaven in the heart, it can also make something like a hell, and that in the same heart. Any minister who has had much experience in the cure of souls knows this fact. And many of the great Christian biographies, the lives of the greatest saints, bear witness to it; for just those natures which are religiously the most highly gifted are the most susceptible to such distress.

May not we ourselves understand something of this, even if we are, thank God! strangers to the experience? Think what it is to a man, to any man who believes in God and loves God, to *feel* that God is his, that whatever befall him, God is left, his sure defence, his unfailing hope, his exceeding great reward. When Henry Martyn lay dying, fever-stricken and alone, he wrote: "I thought of my God, in solitude my company, my Friend and my Comforter." A man may ride out great storms when he feels that he has that anchor to hold by. You yourselves know what it is to go to your Heavenly Father and cast upon him your burdens of sin and weakness, sorrow and care. You know what it is when depressed and in perplexity to say,

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God”; or what it is, when hopes are blighted, or troubles rain thick upon you, when trusted ones are faithless or loved ones are taken away, to find in your certitude of God the strength to bear it all. You can find healing and comfort under the wings of His unchanging love. What then would it be to feel, and just at your greatest need, that you had lost God; that you were left with a dumb universe, to face time and fate, life and death, alone; that you were outside the circle of the Divine love and compassion and care for ever? I cannot, I confess, realize what such a sense of God-forsakenness would be even in my own case, much less what it would be for those of far stronger and finer religious sensibilities than mine.

But what can this have been to Jesus Christ? For this was what now befell Him; this was the tremendous cloud, blacker than death, which now enveloped His soul.

“The mark of rank in nature
Is capacity for pain.”

And to be able to conceive His capacity for such pain, we should need to have a faith in God, and a joy in God, and a nearness to God, equal to His. Never did the soul of all sorrow and consternation so breathe in any word as in that long, lonely cry from the Cross. Every day and hour until now, He had not only trusted in God, but had enjoyed the Father’s full response to His trust. He had been conscious that He and the Father were one, that all He thought and desired and willed was pleasing in the Father’s sight. Amid all

sorrows and disappointments, when men rejected Him and wounded His spirit, He instinctively turned from earth to heaven, from the blind misjudgment and hate of men to the light and love of God. Now all this is in a moment taken away. As the last trial of His faith and obedience, this stream of loving fellowship and joyous assurance which had flowed through His whole earthly life is dried up at the source. The Divine Spirit ceased to exercise upon Him that influence which brings light and comfort to the soul. That it should have been thus with Him—all darkness, gross darkness with Him who was the child of light, that He who was the well-beloved always dwelling in the Bosom of God should seem to Himself to be drifting out into unimaginable regions of chill and gloom where God was not—this is one of the most amazing facts in that life where all is amazing. Yet so it was. Why hast *Thou* forsaken me? He said. He was well accustomed by this time to being forsaken by men. But this was the uttermost desolation. My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? The whole world has cast me off. Thou wast all I had. I trusted in thee; I said thou wouldst be with me. Why hast Thou forsaken me? And He was sinking; the life-tide was ebbing fast. The cold hand of Death was at His heart. And He could bear it all—all but this, that God should let Him die thus, without a word, without a whisper of love to His soul, forsaken, abandoned to His fate. I am trying to speak of what is far beyond any man to speak of. But we know intuitively that here was the absolute of spiritual suffering. There was no greater woe the soul could bear. And if we think of Christ

as suffering on our behalf, as the Lamb of God saving us by the utter completeness of His sacrifice and obedience, we must see in this their crown and masterpiece. Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all. For this, the Beloved lay in the lowest pit; the abyss heard from Him the cry of the soul's last be-reavement and desolation.

But in these words of Jesus Christ we find not only the absolute of suffering. Shall it seem paradoxical if I say that in this last conflict with despair we find the absolute of *faith*, its last and fiercest trial, its last and loftiest triumph? But again we must see intuitively that it is even so. Again Christ exhausts the possibilities. The final essence of all faith is in these words. For what is faith, and what is its triumph? When the Psalmist says, I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me, that is something which all men can understand—to trust God and be thankful unto Him when He is openly and unquestionably kind. But is the triumph of faith to trust in God against all appearance, to say like Job, Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him? Is it a still greater triumph of faith when it rises superior to intellectual and moral perplexities, to those questionings of the soul which go to the heart of all things, to trust notwithstanding all that in a world like this can veil God's truth and obscure His love and challenge His faithfulness? Then that trial and triumph were our Lord's to the last degree of possibility. All the confusions and contradictions of this perplexing world were focussed upon Calvary. If ever there have

been time and place where it could be said, "There is no God," it was there. It was the hour and power of darkness. Falsehood and wrong were at the top of their triumph; truth, goodness, and love crushed into the dust; Caiaphas and Pilate on the judgment seat, Jesus on the Cross. How hideous a chaos, how God-forsaken and devil-ridden did the world appear! And if it has sometimes, as it has to-day, that godless look, and if we are ever in that place of temptation where a man because of his very faith in the living God feels himself confounded by the course of events, and by his very faith is compelled to ask "Why"—"Why is it thus with me? Why is it thus with the world?"—is compelled to appeal to God as it were against Himself, to the God whom the soul knows and trusts against the God who seems to permit facts to give the lie to His justice and love, let us remember that our Saviour Himself has been in that place. As it has been memorably said, All the millions of "whys" that have ever risen from perplexed souls were concentrated in that "why" of Jesus Christ.

And yet more than this is present in His experience. The last victory of faith is to rise superior to *feeling*, to triumph over the direct consciousness of the soul itself. It is very possible, as the records of religious faith so often show, for a man to be made a mark for all the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," to seem "smitten of God and afflicted," and for that man to feel assuredly in his heart that God loves him, and even with such a heightened assurance that in this one great happiness he possesses all things. But when all a man feels, all he is conscious of, is

darkness, and yet he stretches out his hands and struggles towards the light, this is faith in the highest degree. And this is one of the many crowns upon Christ's head—the crown of Faith. He feels despair, only despair, yet he exercises faith. Feeling forsaken of God, he calls only the more upon God. Think how through that awful gloom and desolation of feeling the faith of Jesus stretches forth both its hands to the God whose love He could not feel, and cries, "My God, my God." All God's billows go over Him and bury Him in darkness, yet in the depths He clings to the Rock. ¹ "As one in deep water, feeling no bottom, makes a desperate plunge forward and stands on solid ground, so Jesus in the very act of uttering His despair overcomes it. Feeling forsaken of God, He rushes into the arms of God; and these close around Him in loving embrace." The darkness passed away; the last moments were full of God's perfect peace. The last victory of Faith was won.

What have these words of Jesus to say to us? For one thing, this: that faith in God is always a victory; always it has a resistance to overcome. Sometimes it has been persecution—the scaffold, and the stake; sometimes it is the appetites and desires of our own carnal nature; sometimes the tyranny of worldly opinion and sentiment; sometimes the confident pretensions of scepticism, scoffing at all spiritual reality as an empty dream; sometimes the want of any *felt* assurance in our own souls. Always faith is, more or less, a struggle and a victory.

¹Stalker's *Trial and Death of Jesus Christ*, p. 230.

For another thing, this: that this victory is assured to us only through Jesus Christ. In these days I think often of that word of St. Peter in his First Epistle—"You who by Him do believe in God." I do not see how in this world, bathed with tears and blood, turned upside down by hate and devilishness, one can believe in God except by Jesus Christ in whom we have learned to see God Himself bearing the cross of man's sin and misery. I think also of that other word which speaks of Christ as the Leader and Perfecter of faith. Leader and Perfecter—yes, in His personal struggle and victory lay the struggle and victory of all mankind. He knew, He passed through, the absolute worst, and by the power of faith turned it into the absolute best. On the one side was the faith of that solitary man, hanging on a cross; on the other the whole mustered forces of arrogant, God-denying evil. And Faith triumphed. Brethren, let none of us expect to escape the trial of our faith; but looking unto the Leader and Perfecter we shall never fail. It may even be that one day we may have to taste some bitter drop of that last trial of faith—clinging to God in the dark, clinging to God without feeling that He is near, without comfort or joy at all, trusting just because God is God, not because we feel happy in doing so. Then let us remember that He who of all the sons of men had the fiercest conflict with despair became by that very conflict the Leader and Perfecter of Faith. Remember it now. Some of us, most of us, I trust, come to the Lord's Table with humble yet happy confidence, with deep, quiet joy in our Saviour. Yet there may be some who will come with hesitation, with hearts that feel

trustless, loveless, joyless, without conscious response to the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I bid them remember, and let us all remember, that His promises and gifts are not to our feelings but to our faith, our *will* to trust Him, and to trust not because of anything that is in ourselves, but because of everything that is in Him. One thing alone is ours by right—Despair. But He who has borne the rest of our burden has borne this too, and has transformed it into Faith's sublimest triumph. What He did for us He can do in us: make strength perfect in weakness, and faith perfect through our fears. Therefore, my brethren, hold fast by Him; and let your prayer be this:

Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without thee I cannot live.
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without thee I dare not die.

VI

IT IS FINISHED

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.—John 19: 30.

It is finished. In themselves the words are colourless. They might be the words of anyone when he comes to die, and on different lips they might express widely different meanings. They might be words of regretful farewell: the last candle in the banqueting-hall is going out, and the lingering guest must rise and depart. They might be words of revolt and despair: this life was all I had for pleasure, for work, for ambition, and now it is finished and I am thrust out by a cruel fate into cold oblivion and nothingness. They might be words of relief: life's struggles and disappointments, the fever and the fret, are over and the weary river reaches at last the sea. They might be words of simple and manly acquiescence.

Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave, and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

On the lips of Jesus Christ they have the meaning He alone could give them. They are the proclamation of a victor, the confident announcement not merely that suffering and struggle are ended, but that something

has been for ever achieved, securely accomplished, something that will never have to be repeated, altered, or supplemented, and from which nothing can ever be taken away.

These words of the dying Christ are the supreme example of "the ruling passion strong in death." As has been often pointed out, they carry us back to the first words of His which have been recorded: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Already at twelve years of age He was aware of a business with which He was charged; already the imperative of Heaven was laid upon His young soul; and as the years passed, the task He was sent to fulfil rose before Him in always more clearly developed outline. Jesus Christ never sauntered through life, doing now this thing, now that thing, by turns. He had a work to do and to finish. This was the concentrated aim of all His energies, never lost sight of, never interrupted, never hurried over, pursued without haste, without pause or faltering, to the end. When He came within sight of the end and spake with His Father concerning Himself, this was His thanksgiving for having lived: "I have glorified thee upon the earth; I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." It was not then actually finished. Gethsemane, the Judgment hall, Calvary, still lay in front. But what He could then say by anticipation He now affirms with His expiring breath: "It is finished."

But what was it that was finished, and how was it finished? There are two things about that work of Jesus Christ which fill one with amazement; the one, the divine magnitude of the enterprise; the other, the

divine simplicity of the means. During the last half century criticism has been fiercely at work on the Gospel records, on the history of the early Church, and, at the heart of it all, on the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ. And I venture to say that, in my judgment at least, the result of that criticism has been to establish more firmly the fact that in His own conviction Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God, the person through whom the Divine Redemption was to come to the world, a new heavenly era to be ushered in, through whom men were to be saved, not alone from human oppressions or the minor ills of life, but from sin and death, those dread tyrants who had reigned so long and with so undisputed sway that their dominion seemed to be inseparable from man's very existence. That was the astonishing work to which Jesus deliberately addressed Himself. And how did He address himself to it? By organising some vast, ambitious scheme of religious, moral and political reform, with international committees and complex ramifications? He began just with Himself. He must be the living centre, the protoplasmic germ of the whole. The new Kingdom of God must be first embodied in Himself. There is no more penetrating interpretation of the method of Jesus than in the words of St. Paul: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one should many be made righteous." What God needed, and the world needed, was the one man: it always is. If there was one man who should break through the long tradition of human sin and self-will, and live out the will of God in the whole round of human existence, one who should

“give up his will to God’s will from dawn to twilight and from birth to death”; if the Father could get one to serve him thus, the consecration of that perfect life (“not by water only, but by blood also”) would be the sacrifice that would atone for all the sin and lovelessness of mankind. In that one man the world would make a new start. A new spirit would be infused into its life. He would be the beginning of a new lineage, a new order of humanity. By him as the Leader of salvation, God would bring many sons unto glory.

And this was now accomplished, finished, on the Cross. My brethren, we must never take our eyes off the Cross. If we look away from the Cross we shall forget what sin is, what the love of Christ is, the sacrificial power of God to overcome sin. Yet let us not misunderstand the Cross. What was the finished sacrifice of the Cross? What was *there* that was the perfect expression of the will of God and that was of infinite hope for the world? Theology has sometimes spoken as if it were the sufferings of the Cross, *as such*, that possessed all saving virtue; as if it were by the mere agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary that God was well pleased. A ghastly idea, that goes near to bringing down our God and Father to the level of the bloodthirsty deities of paganism. What virtue is there in suffering merely as suffering, in blood merely as blood, in death merely as death, to please God and to finish His work? Blood, agony, death, these might satisfy a Moloch; but the God who is love—what will satisfy Him and fulfil his purpose? Only love, love to the uttermost, love stronger than death. The God of righteousness, what will satisfy Him and manifest His

will? Only righteousness, obedience to the uttermost, faithfulness stronger than death. That was the true sacrifice, and the Cross was its altar, and without that altar of the Cross Christ could not have offered the sacrifice. Let us, I say again, never take our eyes off the Cross with its blood, its agony, its death. How hideous in themselves! How glorious when they became the chalice into which Jesus Christ poured the soul of all love and truth and self-surrender! And now it was "finished"; that living sacrifice, that obedience which exhausted the possibilities of obedience, which transcended all the obedience of earth because perfect as that of Heaven, and all the obedience of Heaven because wrought out amid the struggles, temptations and sorrows of earth, obedience as divine as the will to which it was rendered.

And now, using these words, "It is finished," as a window through which we are permitted a glimpse into our Saviour's soul as He hung there on the Cross, let us try to conceive what were the thoughts and emotions that occupied His mind and stirred His heart. We cannot but interpret them as, in the first place, a cry of profoundest *thankfulness and relief*. Some of you have had an ordeal of fierce suffering to pass through, or have finished a task which drained all your strength and resolution in the doing, and you remember still the sigh of relief with which you said: "There! at last it is finished." What must the sensation be when some vast enterprise to which men have braced their energies for half a life-time is finished, when a Newton or a Kepler has made the last of ten thousand calculations which adds the final link to the

long chain of scientific demonstration? What will be the feeling of our war-worn battalions, of the nation and the whole world, when it can be said of the War that it is finished? But beyond all parallel must have been the relief with which Jesus Christ now saw His work on earth as a thing done, never to be done again. Yes, I say relief; for His nature was our nature. He loved His work; it was no enforced task. He was the Good Shepherd, and in His love rejoiced to lay down His life for the sheep. Had it been to do over again, then over again He would have done it. But there was another side to His experience. You remember how He set his face, with the rigidity of self-mastering resolve, to go to Jerusalem, every step a triumph over flesh and blood. And how when the worst came, He was constrained to say: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." And now that cup has been put into His hand for the last time, full, full of its awful draught, and He has drunk it to the dregs. And we cannot but hear the tone of almost inexpressible relief in the cry with which He set aside that cup, now empty for ever. And as we follow Him through the tragic experience of His passion, how we rejoice to come with Him to this glad end! The treachery, the mockery, the forsaking by man and by God, the darkness without and within—all are past, never to return. It is finished. Soon now shall the weary Toiler, the agonising Sufferer, be at rest.

And yet far more we hear in that word the tone of *conscious triumph*. What triumph is there like the victory of finished work? But think of that triumph in whatsoever instance you will—in the humblest work-

man who turns out, as perfect as he can make it, the article into which he has put something of his creative self; the poet writing the last line of his epic; the painter putting the last touch to the masterpiece of his art; the explorer penetrating at last the long-hidden secret of a dark continent; even the apostle writing within sight of the scaffold, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"—which of them can offer more than a remote parallel to the triumph of that crucified Man as He sees lying behind Him His great work, as He says of "the most glorious thing ever done in the universe," It is finished? It is too stupendous for our minds to take in. They can only touch it as our hands may touch the base of some tall cliff. They cannot put themselves around it, nor stretch themselves to its altitude. Yet with our souls we can feel its reality, can touch it and thrill at the touch. Jesus Christ, on the Cross, suffering a malefactor's doom, dying amid the jeers of the rabble and the curses of the priests, is the one entirely victorious man that has ever lived. He has put sin and the world under his feet, and death remains only as "the triumphal arch through which the conqueror passes into the city, where the throne and the crown await him."

And, further, the Christian mind always feels this word as a *proclamation* to the world. The lonely sufferer was addressing no audience except Himself. His loud cry was simply the spontaneous utterance of intense emotion. But it has gone out to the ends of the earth declaring to all ages that that is finished which in verity brings the divine salvation nigh to sinful men. It is, as one has said, Christ preaching Christ

and Him crucified. We hear nowadays much less of Christ's "finished work" than our fathers did. As coins by too often passing from hand to hand lose their brightness and the sharpness of their imprint and need to be reminted, so theological formulæ and religious phrases, when they are overworked, become trite and outworn, and instead of stimulating serve rather to smother thought and feeling. The living thought of each generation must create its own forms of expression; and one would hope that nothing more than this is implied in the disuse of the venerable phrase, Christ's "finished work." For my part, I am not ashamed of it nor averse to using it. Something *was* finished on the Cross, an immeasurable thing, the absolute spiritual sacrifice in which the Divine love took upon itself the burden and the guilt of sinful humanity, that sacrifice which we must accept, to which we must consent to be indebted, on which we must cast our souls in utter reliance, and which we must lay upon our souls till they kindle with its fire of purity and love; that eternal thing with which we must begin and in which we must ever abide. If this Gospel of the "finished work" means that in order to obtain pardon, peace with God and eternal redemption, there is nothing for you to do, nothing to suffer, nothing to give, but to commit yourself and all your mass of needs to Christ, that is the Gospel which with my heart's deepest conviction I preach to you now. "It is finished." It is the proclamation that He has rolled away the stone from the sepulchre in which humanity was entombed, and now He calls us to arise and come forth. It bids us come in all our poverty and prodigal's rags to our

Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare. The way is clear; the door is open; and He is waiting with welcoming arms for every one who would enter into life.

And there is yet another thought which the great word irresistibly suggests to me, the thought of Christ's *unfinished* work. That is a thought we cannot begin even to outline; it fills the whole future, in time and eternity, of men, nations, empires, the world, the universe, things visible and things invisible, things on the earth and things in the heavens. The one point I take is that the work of Jesus Christ was at that moment finished only because it was the perfected beginning of a work that never will be, never can be, finished. The life of Christ was as it were a seed filled with all the fulness of God; and what was now finished was just the sowing of the seed that it might bring forth its divine fruit in other lives without end for ever. And it is in no other sense that any life on earth can ever be truly finished and complete. The broken column in the churchyard sometimes seems to us the fittest symbol of all human life and achievement. Everywhere is unfinished work, purposes broken off, aspiration unrealised, promise unfulfilled. Life is crowded with beginnings, made up of broken fragments. Bless God for it! Only what is of the earth earthy is ever complete. This life is not meant to be a circle closing us in; it is a path leading us elsewhere. The incompleteness is the mark of the greatness.

A German theologian prophesied some time ago that the hope of immortality would count for less and less in the religion of the future, and would ultimately

disappear. He spoke before the War, and then he did speak with some apparent warrant. There is no doubt about it. The hope of immortality was counting for less in our religion, far less, than it has a right to count for. But the prophet spoke before the War. That hope is to-day more real and more precious than ever. The need of it is always with us; for time and fate seem always the most fitful and capricious of agents, whose operations have no regard to the completeness of our lives. But to-day, when, obeying the call of duty, men are cut down in swathes long before the scythe of time had any claim upon them, their dreams and ambitions all unrealised, their expectation cut off—if that were all, if thus it were *finished*, then, “Lord, what is man? His days are like unto vanity.” But look away to Calvary; for it is wonderful how, from whatever point of the moral compass we look, we find there the centre of light. Just so as regards time and circumstances Jesus finished his course. He too finished it early, finished it violently, tragically. He was taken away in the midst of his days. In a sense, no one ever left so much undone, laid down a life of such unexhausted power. Yet all was finished, all He came into the world to do. What is it that makes life full and complete? Only that which made His life complete—doing the will of God. You and I may not get time and strength to do our own will, to carry out our own plans; almost certainly we shall not. But for doing the will of God, for carrying out His purpose in our lives—brethren, there is an appointed time to man upon the earth, and it is for *that* it is appointed. And if our hearts are truly set with Christ’s heart

to do that Divine will and day by day to be faithful at the post of duty, then, whether it be in the springtime of life, or in its summer-prime, or in the autumn of patriarchal age, we too shall be able to lay our life and our life's work at the Master's feet, and say, "Such as it is, with all the sins that need Thy forgiveness, all the flaws that need Thy mending, it is finished."

VII

INTO THY HANDS

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.—Luke 23: 46.

It is sometimes said that one notable difference between the religion of to-day and that of an earlier time is, that we now regard religion as having been given to teach us how to live rather than how to die. There is a certain truth in the statement. One sometimes feels that the piety of a past generation was too much "sicklied o'er" by the pallor of the tomb; sometimes it spoke as if a peaceful or triumphant deathbed were religion's grandest achievement. The change of emphasis is a wholesome one; and yet what God hath joined we must not put asunder. Not life, not death, but life and death, as they form our human lot, form also our religious problem; and unless our religion is of that kind which can meet us in the depths and accompany us in the last solitude, it fails us in all.

Now the one dying of which the Bible contains anything approaching to a full account is the dying of the Lord Jesus. As a rule, it preserves a remarkable reticence regarding the last moments and experiences and utterances of the saints and sinners whose lives it records; but every word uttered by our Lord Jesus during the last hours of that mortal life which he offered up for our salvation seems to have been religi-

ously preserved by one or other of the evangelists. And this evening we come to the last of these. With the cry, "It is finished," He had said farewell to the life of earth. All its elements of labour and sorrow and apparent failure are summed up in those words, and, so summed up, are turned into the elements of final victory and perfect thanksgiving. Now with this word of calm prayer He addresses Himself to the soul's last journey, its passage to the world to come. And priceless are these words, priceless as unique, which reveal to us what death was to Jesus when He was in its very presence, in its very grasp, in the very act of submission to its power. They do not enable us to follow Him, or any other, across the silent river, but His last thought in the moment of pushing off from the shore, this they give us.

And, first, they reveal to us that Jesus made of death an *act*, a voluntary act. In dying He is not merely passive; He does something; there is an act of will by which He finally surrenders Himself into the Father's protection and keeping. We are not wont to think of death as a voluntary act; we think of it as the last pathetic spectacle of human weakness rather than as the last exercise of human power. It is appointed to all men once to die, and there is no resisting nor evading that appointment. Ready like corn ripe for the sickle, or in the green lustihood of youth and vigour; full of miseries so that the end comes as a welcomed relief, or with life's brimming cup scarcely tasted—when the hour comes man must depart. Man cometh forth as a flower and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not. But we can never asso-

ciate such thoughts as these with the death of Jesus Christ. Not that He did not suffer the stroke of mortality in the inevitable human way, by natural physical causes. I do not mean that. I do not believe, with some great theologians like St. Augustine, that it was only by the direct, miraculous act of His own will that He could die, and did die. When I say that our Lord made of dying a voluntary act, I mean that His thought never rested in what we call natural causes, but always beyond them saw His Father's hand ordering all things; and that now in death, as throughout His life, He recognised no necessity except the Father's will. And that will He now made His own. Here was no feeling of submitting to a mere inevitable fact or irresistible fate. He is not snatched out of life, nor dragged away by an iron law of nature. In the last moments He is not face to face with the spectral power we call Death. He is face to face with the Father, and in trustful, loving obedience yields Himself into the hands of God.

Think of it. In a moment He was to be dead, to have no more part in all that is done under the sun. He was to be dead in every sense that makes the death of a living, breathing man that pathetic and irreversible event over which all generations mourn. And He willed that it should be so. "It is finished," He cried; "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The last enemy, says St. Paul, is Death; and it is here, surely, we see the last victory it is given to man to win. As Christ could conquer temptation only by grappling with temptation's utmost power, and suffering only by suffering, so He could overcome

death only by dying and in dying. We constantly speak of Jesus as the conqueror of Death; but what do we mean by it? Where is it we see Him most gloriously triumphant over the power of Death? When He stood at the mouth of the tomb and the dead heard His voice and came forth? No. When He Himself arose in the strength of His immortal life? Not even there, I think. But here, here on the Cross, where He seems to be Death's victim, given over to it as a prey, here where in mortal weakness He faces Death as mortal man has to face it. He looks into the darkness and fears it not. He advances to meet it with the same salutation with which He had met every duty and every event—Lo, I come to do thy will, O God; and as He had made of all things else His stepping-stones, so He made of this last descent of self-surrender the last stepping-stone up to the throne of His moral sovereignty. That is what I mean by saying that Jesus made of death a voluntary act. In dying He lived, lived intensely, not with the intensity of struggle—that was past—but with the calm intensity of faith.

For these words of the Lord Jesus reveal his dying as an act of will because it was an *act of faith*. The word here translated ¹ “commend” is one of those which in the Bible belong distinctively to the vocabulary of Faith. It is the same word which St. Paul, for example, uses in his great confession: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to

¹In other passages translated “commit.” In older English the two words are synonymous. While we speak of “committing” to memory or to writing, it spoke of “commending.”

keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." The word literally means to "deposit," as when persons deposit their valuables with their banker for safe custody, because for the time they are unable to guard them under their own hand. Such is the meaning here. As when we fall into the unconsciousness of sleep, our spirits, our conscious selves, pass out of our own possession and control, and must be kept for us somehow, by some one, until we awake, so our Lord, about to fall into that sleep from which one does not awake in this world, places His spirit as a sacred deposit in His Father's hands, to be held and safely kept for Him until He awake on the other side of death.

It is an act of faith, and the light of faith is the only light that can shine upon that hour. Of what it is to die, experience has nothing, never can have anything to say.

Strange, is it not, that of the myriads who
Before us passed the gates of darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the road,
Which to discover we must travel too?

"Which to discover we must travel too." It is, and to the end of time must be, altogether unknown and unimaginable. We all become familiar with the outward aspect of death. We may have seen others die. We may have followed the departing up to the gates of the unseen, to the last flicker of expiring consciousness. But there the veil falls. "Twilight and evening-bell, and after that—the Dark!" And it might be only that—the great darkness, to go we know not where, to be-

come we know not what. The one ray in that darkness is the star of Faith. We can believe, and do believe, that the other side of this falling asleep is the soul's awaking to the consciousness of another world. We can believe, and do believe, that the passage from the one state of being to the other is brief; instantaneous, it may be; that soon as the light of this world fades, the light of that other world begins to dawn. But we can only believe it; until we ourselves make the journey, we cannot know what it is to cross that mysterious frontier.

And these words of our Lord, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," show that in this also He was made like unto His brethren. He walked by faith, not by sight. We cannot, indeed, measure His faith by any experience of our own. He was holy; He was heavenly; all His life He had been looking to that Eternal World to which He was now going; His communications with it were constant and vivid far beyond anything we can know. Yet it was by faith He thus lived, and now it is in faith He addresses Himself to the last act of all. This was a way He had not trod before, an unknown journey for which He could only bespeak His Father beforehand to be the guide and guardian of His spirit. This was the faith of the Lord Jesus in dying. He looked into the darkness and through the darkness. He looked with the eye of Faith and saw, not the hands of Death with their cold and terrible clutch to drag Him down into its gulf, but the mighty and gentle hands of God, stretched out to draw Him near. And into that safe and blessed keeping He gave His spirit up with the repose of abso-

lute trust, with the ineffable content of one whose painful, weary journey is ended and who can at last lay him down and take his rest.

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There is a very exquisite association connected with these words. Except the word "Father," which is our Lord's own, they are a quotation from the thirty-first Psalm; and they form part of the evening prayer which devout Jewish mothers are still wont to teach their little ones when lying down to sleep at night.¹ In the humble home at Nazareth one might have heard Mary teaching the child Jesus to repeat them, as evening by evening He lay down in the happy rest of childhood. And now, in the last twilight, closing life's heavy-laden day, it is with the prayer of His childhood still upon His lips that He betakes Himself to the last repose.

Such was the faith in which the Lord Jesus met and conquered Death; and only He can make us *partakers of that faith*. Science and philosophy, all the best teachers of our race, apart from Christ, are vague and cheerless as to that last voyage in which, once we quit the shore, "no star will guide us back." The religion of Christ is the only religion to live in and to die in. That religion is utterly fearless; those in whom its light has been kindled have never feared the last enemy except when their faith has suffered a momentary eclipse. Not only is that religion fearless, it is full of visions, it is ablaze with hope. "It fills the night of Death with innumerable stars; all the

¹*v. Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, by Israel Abrahams, p. 329.

promises of God light up the darkening vision of earth's closing hours." "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

But may not all this be a pleasing fantasy, a mirage that only reflects the image of our own desires? I cannot give you coercive logical proof that it is not; no man can. No man can prove in that way that all the truths we hold truest and all the things we hold most sacred are not delusions. All the truths by which our souls live we hold by no other tenure than the certitude of faith. But this is to be said—not unless the whole Christian conception of life is a freak of the imagination, unless the Cross of Christ and all it stands for, the reality of the spiritual, the Kingdom of God, the supremacy of right, the good fight of faith, the life of love and service and self-sacrifice—not unless all this is a fair but unsubstantial dream can the Christian hope in death be unreal. Christianity is one and indivisible, and if its faith in the divine meaning of life is true, its faith in the divine meaning of death cannot be false.

Consider once more this faith of Christ in the face of death; consider what it was, and how it may be ours. It was bound up indissolubly with His faith in God; it was summed up in that word "Father." That one word was, you might say, the creed of Jesus Christ. It expressed to him the centre and the sum of all reality. It expressed His certainty of the Almighty Love and Goodness and Joy that are at the heart of all things. God is: God is God, One whose presence

and power permeate all things, in whose thought and will all live and move and have their being; and this God is our Father who knows each of us, cares for each, loves each of us with a love that cannot let us go, to which our redemption and perfection are an everlasting necessity. From the beginning of the Gospel, this is Christ's great truth. He begins by calling us to trust the Father for the life of the present. He bids us observe how He cares for the least of His creatures—the bird of the air, the flower of the field—gives them a home in His world, and provides for them all things needful to the full and happy development of the life for which He has made them. And if for them, how much more for us, His children. Thus does He teach us to trust the Father for the life that now is, to ask and receive each day our daily bread, to fear nothing but sin, and be anxious for nothing but to do the Father's will. And now if we have learned that lesson, He bids us take the next step and learn another; by His own calm faith in the very article of death He bids us trust our Father in death and for what comes after death as much as for the morrow. And it is not only reasonable, it is inevitable that we should do so. If you trust, you trust. You cannot draw a line on this side of which you will trust but beyond which you will not. You cannot trust, really *trust*, a man for five dollars and be unable to trust him for ten. You cannot thus both trust and distrust your fellow-man. Nor can you trust God for the morrow and not trust him for the day after, for a hundred or a thousand years hence, for all eternity. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." By that word

Jesus Christ says to us: "If you have known the Father, if you have trusted Him in life, you cannot but trust Him in death. You cannot drift beyond His love and care. You cannot take too hopeful a view of what is to come after this mortal life. It is a step not into the dark but into the light. You may not, indeed you cannot, know what old needs will disappear and what new needs arise, when you have changed this manner of existence for another so different; but joyfully commit all to the Father. In His house there are many mansions, and there, as here, He will give the most and the best you are capable of receiving."

And so this word from the Cross comes to us with the greatest of all questions and the most urgent of all messages. The one thing in this world we all certainly have to do, and can do only once, is to die. How shall we be able to do that thing? How shall we do—you and I—in the swellings of Jordan? I put that question, and I can imagine that some of you would make reply that there are many questions for you to answer which are more profitable and more urgent than that. And you may be right, and also you may be wrong, in what you mean. If you mean that the immediately pressing question is not as to one's preparedness for death, but is whether one is properly fit to live, you are altogether in the right. Yet to put the one question may help us to answer the other. To live rightly is the only preparation needed, the only preparation possible, for dying rightly. The fitness is the same. But it is the same; and while I do not want any one to think of life mainly as a preparation for death or to regard its journey as a

march daily nearer to the grave, while I would not have any one entertain so morbid a conception, I do want you all to-night to face this question as honestly as you can—Would I be willing to die in the life I am now living? Surely that is the test of the rightness. Apply it. Men die as they live. The unholy man dies in his unholiness, the fool in his folly; the pharisee dies a pharisee, the soldier fighting for the right dies as a hero fighting for the right, the man who lives trusting in God dies trusting in God. As to ourselves, then, could we die willingly and well in the life we are now living?

Let this word of Jesus tell us again what that life is in which a man can die willingly and well. It is the life that is inspired by that word "Father," the life of trust in a God who is eternal and unchangeable, who has made us for Himself, who in creating us has bound our lives to His by ties which on His side cannot be severed, who loves us in our weakness, loves us in our sinfulness, whose love sent His Christ to bring us back to Himself from the darkness of our sin and the estrangement of our hearts; it is the life of trust in that Divine Father and of obedience to His will, the life that is lived not for self, not for temporary trivial things, but for doing right, for fighting the good fight and fulfilling the service of love; in the one word that includes and illumines all, it is the life of following Christ. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." That was His last prayer; but it was only the final utterance of that which had inspired His whole life. Every day, in its venture of faith, in its doing of the Father's work, He had invested His all in the Father's

service and intrusted it to the Father's keeping. Let such be our life, and such too will be the end that crowns the work. Life is robbed of its terrors if we know the Father, for our times are in His hands; and death will be no fearful adventure, but a passing more than ever into those hands which safely keep and increase and glorify all that is committed to their eternal guardianship.

VIII

STRENGTH AND BEAUTY

And upon the top of the pillars was lily-work; so was the work of the pillars finished.—I Kings 7: 22.

Among the most striking architectural features of Solomon's Temple were two grand, stately pillars, which were deemed so important and were regarded with such pride that actually a name was given to each of them. And attention is called especially to the adornment of these pillars. The men who designed and executed the building of the temple aimed at something more than a merely commodious building, wind-and-water-tight; they would make their handiwork strong but also beautiful, beautiful as they could devise. And while the pillars, the rugged blocks from the quarries of Lebanon, unhewn and unadorned, would have borne as securely the massive beams of the Temple, these men wrought not only from need but from love, and patiently carved upon the stately columns a garland of lily-work. This is what I wish to speak of this morning—the pillar and the lily-work, strength and beauty.

What is beauty? It is hard to answer that question except by saying that beauty is what appeals to our sense of the beautiful. That is a sense we all possess in greater or less degree, and, from the dimmest origins of humanity, men have always possessed

it. It is, moreover, a faculty separate and distinct from any other. You can no more explain by logic why the purple shadow on a mountain is beautiful, and a rubbish-heap ugly, than you can explain the taste of foods by a theory of colours. The sense of the beautiful is one of the ultimate things in human psychology, as much so as intelligence or conscience itself. But this I think we may say, that we are always conscious of beauty as something over and above bare utility; it is the lily-work graven upon the pillar. I do not in the least mean that beautiful and ornamental are convertible terms. Ornament may be only added ugliness, and always is so when it is used to disguise inferiority of material, weakness of design, or bad workmanship. But it is a characteristic of all that is beautiful, or is thought to be or intended to be beautiful, that we recognise in it something which is not called forth by an immediate need, which goes beyond what is strictly necessary, something which endeavours to express an ideal conception. Always men make useful things—steam-engines, drain-pipes, dictionaries, almanacs—because they need them; they make beautiful things—poems, pictures, symphonies—because they love them. Always in workmanship, in nature and art, in things material and things spiritual, *Beauty is the offspring of Love.*

And God is Love, and in God's Temple every pillar has its lily-work. The world in which we live may be regarded as a temple, which has been built up through long ages, according to the plan of God and by His ever-active hand. And as we examine it, we see that everywhere strength and solidity and coherence

are the Builder's first care. "The world is established that it cannot be moved." "He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods." Everywhere stability and order are the Creator's first principles. God's house is built not in the first place to look well, but to wear well and to stand for countless ages; it is built not upon the sands of chance and caprice, but on the rock of steadfast purpose and unchanging law. But God is Love. The creative impulse, the root of all creation, is Love; and therefore, everything He has made He has made not only serviceable but more—beautiful. This great framework of creation in the midst of which God has set us, this fair world with its canopy of blue and its tapestry of green proclaims that its maker is no mere utilitarian, but is the Divine Artist who loves the works of His hands and is never content that they should come short of that superabundant and ultimate lustre of perfection which is beauty. Think how much more nature lavishes upon us than is absolutely needful. We might have had nourishment, meat and drink to sustain existence, without savour; light to do our work by without the glow and charm of various colour; sound without music; there might have been a populated world without homes, without the tender and beautiful ties of husband and wife, parent and child; our souls might have been endowed with reason and conscience only, without those affections, emotions, and sensibilities which make the charm and beauty of our human life. We might have had the pillars without the lily-work. But God is Love, and love fills our cup to overflowing. What a world of beauty

is spread out around us! In spite of the abnormally backward season through which we have passed, it seems to me that I have never seen nature more enchantingly beautiful. The tender green and gold of the opening leaves, the marvel of the trees, clad in an unexampled richness of verdure, and the wealth of blossom and the gaiety of the wild flowers bedecking meadow and wayside—how they satisfy the eye and refresh the soul! What a background to the devastations of war is the beauty of Nature! One of my boys at the front wrote a few weeks ago that the war did not seem so utterly horrible during the dead, stark barrenness of the winter months as now, when it is turning God's world into an inferno among the songs and blossoms of Spring. Yet there is another side to this. It is refreshing, and comforting too, to look on God's world at a time like this. No human wickedness can obliterate its beauty or derange the orderly procession of its seasons. Still the sun shines; the streams run among the valleys; the trees of the Lord are full of sap; the grass grows for the cattle and herb for the service of man. We do our worst, but it is a comfort to think how little after all we can do to disturb the order and mar the fertility and beauty of nature. For,

What is nature's self
But an endless
Strife towards music,
Euphony, Rhyme?

Trees in their blooming,
Tides in their flowing,
Stars in their circling,
Tremble with song.

God on his throne is
Eldest of poets;
Unto his measures
Moveth the whole.

And if God so loves the beauty of things, He means that we should love it too. There was a gate called Beautiful to the Temple of old; and there is a gate Beautiful to the Temple of every man's soul. There is endless difference in the things we admire, and in the way we admire them; but every man admires something. By that gate of admiration and delight let us go out and in, and worship the Lord.

So we pass into the temple of the spiritual. In this temple also there are pillars, and upon the top of the pillars lily-work. Here also God has ordained first strength and then beauty. The Gospel lays the foundations of the spiritual life deep and strong, upon no fluid sentimentalism but on the bedrock of eternal facts. Whatever else the Christian may be, he must be strong. He is to be strong in faith, clear and decided as to the great convictions which are the basis of his life. He is to be strong in conscience. No paltering with right and wrong, but firm loyalty to the fundamental duties and moral obligations! He is to be strong in will, "strengthened with all might in the inner man," resolute, inflexible, patient. These things are the underlying granite. These things must be; and all these the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is able to accomplish in us. But it can do more. On the top of the pillars there shall be lily-work. In the spirit Christ gives us there is strength; there is conscientiousness, devotion to truth, loyalty to principle; but there

is more, there is that which clothes strength with beauty.

And here also we recognize in beauty the same characteristic of superabundance, the impression not of tax and measurement but of a giving from undiminished and inexhaustible resources. It is in this way we distinguish between a merely right action and a beautiful action. The one has what is indispensable of actual integrity, as to tell the truth or pay one's just debts—not to do so would be very wrong; but the other surprises and delights by something over and above of magnanimity, generosity or self-sacrifice. It is beautiful. And on the same principle we say of one man that he has a good character; his character will do, it will serve his needs and carry him through. But we say of another man that his is a beautiful soul. In him virtue and uprightness are not less robust and reliable, but we are conscious of something more—a wonderful charm, a fragrance as from the garden of the Lord. The one kind of character commands respect and invites our trust; the other has a strangely winsome and inspiring power. And again the source and element of this beauty is love. Love is the eternally beautiful, because it is the eternally inexhaustible, and it beautifies everything into which it enters and with which it blends.

The *spontaneity* of love is always beautiful. It is no despicable thing to do a right or a kind action when we are told to do it, or have it suggested to us. But to need to be told takes from it much of its beauty. Our Lord called it a beautiful deed when Mary anointed Him with the precious ointment; and it was so

beautiful in His eyes because, for one thing, it was so entirely spontaneous. No one demanded it from her, no one expected it, no one could have accused her of failing in a manifest duty if she had not done it. Only her own deep, reverent love taught her, a simple maiden dwelling in a country village, to perform an act of queenly munificence and of exquisite spiritual beauty. And it is this beautiful spontaneity that is so much to be desired among us. In the Church there are always persons who will give and even give liberally, who will work and even work diligently, but who need to be warmly solicited, or artfully coaxed, or spurred and incited by the example of others. More of the spontaneity of love would grandly transfigure our Christian giving and our Christian service, would make it beautiful.

Again the *joy* of love in service and sacrifice is always beautiful. The apostolic writer speaks of his readers as having taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods for Christ's sake. And, again let it be said, to make sacrifices of any kind for the cause of Christ, for righteousness' sake, is no small thing. It is no contemptible achievement, even though it be done without joy, with dogged resolution and a stern sense of duty. Yet that "joyfully" contains all the difference between what is indispensably right and what is spiritually beautiful, between the prose and the poetry of Christian service. The sad and sober martyrdom would be wonderful; it would make you marvel at the sheer strength of principle which could constrain men to endure such things, but it would scarcely incite to imitation. The joyful martyrdom would make you

wonder at the triumph of love and long to know its secret and share its power. It is the artist's delight in his work that makes it beautiful; and it is when something of Christ's own love and joy enter into our service and sacrifice that they begin to wear the halo of beauty.

And most beautiful of all is the *humility* of love, its unconsciousness of self. "Moses wist not that his face shone"; and Moses was the only man in the camp of Israel who did not know it. Ah! if he had dreamed that his face shone, or had desired that it should shine, no veil had been needed to mitigate its radiance. The shadow of self would have been veil enough. Nothing is so fatal to the beauty and attractive power of character as when a man gives the impression of being self-complacently aware that his face is shining. Wherever we take credit to ourselves for goodness, the goodness begins to wither and becomes ugly. If when we do a magnanimous or unselfish action we are very conscious of its being so, all the meanness and selfishness which we have expelled by the front-door have only gone round the house and entered again by the back-door. But when you find one, like the Apostle Paul for example, who does noble things, who uncomplainingly bears heavy burdens, forgives great injuries, spends and is spent in the service of his Master, but who never appears to be conscious of doing anything heroic, who just says, "I am debtor; I am doing only what any honest man would do in my place, trying to pay my debts, to do what is my bare and obvious duty," in such lives you behold the beauty of the Lord.

And it is beyond question that among all influences for good spiritual beauty is the most potent. It is not God's greatness, His everlastingness, His omnipotence, His omniscience, it is the Beauty of God that still draws and holds the soul of mankind. The Beauty of God—that is Christ Jesus our Lord. He is the “outshining of the Father's glory,” the “image of the invisible God,” the Beauty of God. My brethren, the one thing from everlasting to everlasting that is beyond all conception both strong and beautiful, strong with all the strength and beautiful with all the beauty of God, is the Love of Christ, that pure, spontaneous, infinite, eternal devotion of the highest to the lowest, of the best to the worst, of Jesus Christ to sinners, to you and me.

How he stands before us in a strength and majesty our deepest reverence cannot worship as it ought, in a beauty of transparent purity, self-forgetting humility and self-sacrificing love our clearest insight cannot receive! I have spoken, not unprofitably, I hope, of the beauty of the soul; but finally let me say this. Remember that with our own beauty we have nothing to do. To make ourselves beautiful is not in the least our business. We cannot do it; and the more we try the more lamentably we shall fail. We can ape the postures and attitudes of spiritual beauty, imitate its accents and expressions, but only to make them ridiculous and disgusting. Beauty cannot be put on; it must be put out, come from within, as

“In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast,
In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove.”

No, we have nothing whatever to do with our own beauty. What we have to do with is the beauty of Christ and of all men and women in whom we see the beauty of Christ reflected. To look to Christ, to study Christ, to follow Christ, to put on Christ, to wash the robes of character in His blood, to live the sacrificial life after Him, that is our task. Aim at this, that you may have more true godliness in your soul, more Christian love, more of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you, and you shall be pillars in His temple, and upon the top of the pillars shall be lily-work.

And finally the thought comes that though beauty of character is of necessity the last perfect product and manifestation of an inward grace, the outward discipline of life has no small part in evoking and directing the soul's growth both in strength and in beauty. The pillar and its embroidery of lily-work is after all a very imperfect emblem of a complex vital process. Still it yields the suggestion that after the pillar has been set up in the temple much remains to be done. The pillar might be set up in a day, but the chiselling of the lily-work was a slow and, if a pillar could feel, a painful process. So if we are set in God's Temple, for His service, all our life long the Divine Artist will be carving the lily-work upon us, and even then the work will not be finished. This is what is going on all the world over in God's Temple. We look upon the scene of life and we see rude scaffoldings, and hear the clang of tools, and see the chips flying; and it seems to our untutored eyes as if the pillar were being defaced and destroyed. But it is the Divine Artist at His work, and He never makes

a false stroke, strikes neither too hard nor too lightly for the material He works upon and the pattern He desires to produce, but so that always strength may be perfected in beauty. That work is going on with trebled intensity in our world to-day. Nay, the figure of chiselling the pillar is too weak for the kind of work God is carrying out. It is with fire God is working on humanity, cleansing, remedial fire, fire that is burning out the wood, hay and stubble we have built into the edifice of civilisation, and into the structure of our own lives. How that fire is searching out the weak spots, the rubbish and the rottenness! How it is exposing the graft and corruption in our own Canadian politics, showing it up in all its hideousness and, we trust, burning it out. And, horrible as war is, how it is shaping life into new strength and beauty! Nothing could be more wonderful, more like a moral miracle, than the noble way in which thousands and millions of our young men have thrown themselves into the sacrificial life as if it were their native element, as indeed it is. I have spoken of the beauty of spontaneity, of joy in sacrifice, of self-forgetfulness; and it is an inspiring spectacle to see how all these ideals are embodied in our soldiers. Not the idlers who have nothing else to do, but the flower of our young manhood, who never once dreamt of finding their vocation in war, leave their colleges, their professions, their businesses, give up their homes and their personal prospects; they abandon the work and the enjoyments of an ordered life to take their part in the hardships and jeopardies of the most squalid and disgusting form of warfare the world has ever

witnessed, where in the loathsome mud of the trenches and among the foul stench of poison-gases, they hazard and, many of them, lay down their lives. And they do it spontaneously. They go into this inferno not from the love of war, not with the dream of glory, but only at the call of duty; for an ultimate good which perhaps they cannot clearly define, which is too large for any of us clearly to define, but a good in which they know their country, and ultimately the whole world, will share. And they do all this so modestly, with a heroism which is so sublimely unconscious of itself. "Do not write to us in the trenches of sacrifice," says a letter from the front, "it is not sacrifice to offer our lives for such a cause. Life so given has a value beyond life." My friends, you and I have a difficult task to live up to the heroic level of these men, our own sons and brothers. Let us try at least to make ourselves more worthy of such sacrifices. When we get into our ordinary life and into the service of God's Kingdom day by day, anything like the spirit which sustains our heroes at the front, we shall soon witness the making of a new world.

I have never urged any man personally to go into this hell of war. I have not directly done any recruiting. But the call for men and still more men becomes more insistent day by day; and this I must and will say: If there is any one here who hears in his soul the whisper of a voice which he knows to be the call of duty, the voice of his own noblest manhood, let him listen to no other voice. Let no influence deflect you; let no hand hold you back. If you do, I shall brand you with no epithet, but have only this

to say, that you will have lost an opportunity, such as seldom comes to men and which will never be repeated, and that you will be a smaller man—just that, a smaller man—to the end of your days. But if, hearing the voice, you listen and obey, you will have the self-rewarding consciousness of doing your duty, of being one of those by whose sublime self-sacrifice the world is being helped forward to a better future, by whose deeds a page of history is being written that will never be obliterated, but will only shine more brightly in the light which succeeding ages will cast upon it.

For all of us, the question of life, life in its strength and beauty, is, now as always, the question of taking up our cross to follow the Christ. May we all answer that question aright!

IX

THE PATTERN OF THE WEB

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.—Acts 12: 6.

The relation of Drama to actual History may perhaps be stated thus—that while history is the web that is woven on the loom of time and circumstance, the dramatist essays to show the pattern of the web. In the actual course of events the interplay of human agency with the physical and moral forces which it alternately sets in motion and is set in motion by is so complex, and involves a process in which the chain of causes and effects is so long drawn-out and many of the links are so subtle and secret, that to unravel it is a task beyond human power; in drama this process is as it were brought to a focus and is seen in a concentrated light. But history, when it is written with the insight of genius, has something of this characteristic of drama; it reveals many dramatic situations. And no record of human life is so full of dramatic situations as the Bible, because none is written with such insight into the eternal laws which govern it; and not even in the Bible itself is there a more dramatic situation than that which is set before us with the simplicity of perfect art in this chapter. Let us study

it, because, though events seldom shape themselves in just this dramatic fashion, we have here the real pattern of the web.

First there appears the sinister figure of Herod. His none too stable throne needed the prop of popularity; and popularity is always most cheaply purchased by persecution of the unpopular, by throwing a victim to prejudice and hate. And so, as we are told with tragic brevity, he "killed James, the brother of John, with the sword." And having discovered a method of ingratiating himself with his subjects which cost him so little, and since to repeat the act was in no way repugnant to his disposition, he proceeded to take Peter also. When the story opens, the meshes of Herod's net are drawn very closely around his intended prey. He lies on the floor of his cell, chained to the arm of a soldier on either side. Outside the bolted door may be heard the heavy breathing of a third; a little further along the corridor a fourth sentinel is posted. And the prisoner's fatal hour is drawing terribly near. It is the last night of Peter's captivity; it is the last watch of the night; by six o'clock of that April morning he is to be led forth to execution, to be, like his Master, first the butt and then the victim of the Jewish mob. That is what Herod is meditating on his bed in the palace; that is, so to say, the first act of the drama.

But in another quarter of Jerusalem another act is simultaneously going forward. The prisoner has friends, faithful and also influential, who are aware of the imminent peril in which he is placed. They are begging Peter's life, not from the arrogant tyrant,

no, but from Him who is higher than the highest; and they have been employed thus all night long. All this is going on at the same moment of time. Herod is purposing the Apostle's death; has arranged it; has given the order and set the machinery in motion for its accomplishment. Peter's friends are clinging to the skirts of omnipotence on his behalf; but the guards are at their post, the prison-doors are fast, and the hour is hastening on.

And what is he doing around whom all this plot is thickening? He is quietly asleep. Herod cannot sleep that night. He is rehearsing on his bed the words in which he will harangue the populace around the scaffold in the morning, and is gloating in anticipation over the plaudits that will salute his ears. And the Apostle's friends cannot sleep; they are held before God in an agony of supplication. But the man whose life is in the balance sleeps, with the sleep of blissful ignorance, of conscious innocence, of happy tranquillity, sleeps in his chains the sleep that "throws Elysium o'er the soul's repose." As he sleeps, perhaps he dreams. He is with the Master again on the bright Galilean Lake, or in the busy streets of Capernaum, or in the desert feeding the multitude; or again he hears the cock crow and meets his Lord's reproachful gaze, and tears again moisten his cheek from beneath his closed eyelids; or again he walks beside the familiar shore and receives the Chief Shepherd's charge to feed the flock, both the lambs and the sheep.

But, after all, might not one regard the prisoner's sleep, tranquil as it was, as only a pathetic symbol of human ignorance and weakness? "Hapless mortal,"

might not one say? "So defenceless, so passive, how thou art made the prey of circumstances! They are marching down upon thee; they are stalking thee, as the hunter his quarry. And thou dost not note their approach; thou dost not hear their stealthy tread; their shadow does not fall upon thy vision. Thy very life is hanging on a hair—and thou sleepest!" Might not one speak thus? Yes, if there were not one more Person in the drama, He who is in the background of every drama. There is the enemy plotting, the friends praying; and the man himself around whom all the menace and the intercession are gathering has shut his eyes and quieted himself to slumber. Because there too is He who, because He slumbereth not nor sleepeth, giveth His beloved sleep. God is there in the palace; there in the house of prayer; there in the prison, keeping all the threads of the drama in his own hands; holding the tyrant's power in derision, hearing the prayer that ascends to His holy habitation, responding to the trust of His child, whom He is lulling to sleep on His bosom. And now it is His time to work. The final act is ready to be launched upon the stage. The moment of deliverance is appointed, and already its messenger and instrument is on the wing to loose him that is appointed unto death. How well may Peter sleep when God is watching over his bed and preparing his awaking! How well may he sleep, be it in outward calm or storm, among friends or foes, who sleeps thus on the pillow of trust in God, whose resting-place is under the shadow of the Almighty!

Now, we have here, as I have said, a clear-cut epitome of life; we have the real pattern of the web.

There is one, and only one, supreme question, one, and only one, debate, which has run through the whole history of man, and which is tugging at us as hard as ever to-day—is there a God, or not? In the world of facts which confronts us, is there a conscience corresponding to the conscience within us? Is that world of facts obedient to an eternal law of right, or, at the bottom of things, is might the only right there is? That is the issue which is so dramatically set before us in this narrative.

Consider what a man like Herod stands for. He is no bigot whose soul is aflame with fierce intolerance of a heretical creed; nor is he a fiend in human form who tortures and slays in the mere lust of cruelty. He is just a man who is without a conscience, and who makes a world after his own likeness, a world in which right and wrong are entirely negligible quantities. To him his fellow-men are simply pawns in the game he plays. If their lives are useful to him they shall live; if their blood will cement the foundations of his throne they shall die. No doubt the matter presented itself to Herod's mind with that difference of emphasis which transformed murder into statecraft. The "tyrant's plea," necessity, justified the atrocity. It was done to win popularity, but the popularity of a monarch, the popularity which is the breath of life to a ruler. Yet the only description that will serve for such a state of mind is that word of the Psalmist: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." The fool so described is not the man who holds atheism as a theory, but he for whom in the world of practical business or politics God simply does not

count. It is the arrogant man like Herod, who in his dealings with his fellowmen recognises no authority but his own will, no law but his own ambitions, no restraint but his own interests. These form the boundaries of his world, from living within which, like a spider in its web, he has lost all sense of the greater world surrounding it. He has no apprehension that there is that in the very nature of things which should make him say "I dare not," that which is not flexible to any human will, which no man can usurp to his own purposes, which will not be bargained with, nor set aside, nor ignored; an unalterable and inescapable power which holds every man in the hollow of its hand, which must be to every man strength and salvation or ever-impending danger and destruction—the law of righteousness, the moral order of a universe created and governed by God.

The Bible has in its great picture-gallery many portraits of this kind of fool. But take an example from secular history. A Greek historian tells us how, when Athens was at the height of its power, it adopted the policy of incorporating all the islands of the Ægean in its empire. One small island, Melos, still retained its independence. The Athenian envoys calmly explained to the islanders that it was necessary to their policy that Melos should submit. They did not pretend that Melos had done any wrong to Athens, or that they had any lawful claim to the island; but, speaking as sensible men to sensible men and dealing with hard facts, they would impress upon the Melians just this, that they had the choice of two alternatives, to submit or to be destroyed. The Melians answered as best

they could. They appealed to justice. Was it quite safe even for Athens to ride roughshod over all the laws of right? We take the risk of that, said the Athenians. They appealed to religion. There are gods, and they will help the innocent. That risk also causes us no uneasiness, said the Athenians; the immediate question was whether they preferred to live or die. Then we choose rather to fight and hope than to accept slavery, replied the brave islanders. A very regrettable misjudgment, said the Athenians; and the war proceeded to its hideous end. They put to death all the Melians whom they found of man's estate, says Thucydides, and made slaves of the women and children. The same winter, the Athenians set sail with a greater fleet than ever before for the conquest of Sicily; and that was the disastrous expedition which brought Athens to her doom. Oh! it is all so old, and all so modern too. "We will take the risk of that—in these questions of practical business and politics religion and morality do not count; at any rate, the risk causes us no uneasiness." Don't you hear in these words what is the working creed of many a man's life? And on the scale of world-history is it not written in letters of fire for all men to read to-day? Put for Athens, Germany,¹ for Melos, Belgium, and you have the history of the present hour. To the list of all the arrogant fools who have said in their hearts that there is no God, the Herods, Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzars, another has added his

¹My attention was first drawn to this historical parallel by a letter in the *Spectator*.

name. The axiom upon which the Kaiser and his war-lords proceed, that in the universal scheme of things nothing is necessary but the success of their arms, that nothing counts in comparison with Germany's getting her way, and that Germany to get her way is entitled to trample the moral order under her feet, the whole deliberate conception of her policy of "frightfulness" with its unblushing contempt for all considerations of right and humanity, its cynical readiness to take the risk of contempt for God and the trust of the wronged in God—this is the very arrogance of God-denial, the supreme impiety. It is such men and thoughts and policies that make one say,

There may be Heaven, there must be Hell.

It is of such that it is written, "He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Their ultimate victory would be the eclipse of the eternal righteousness that rules in earth and heaven; and, as Dr. Denney has lately said, in words we all indorse, the highest calling of faith at this moment in the world's history, the final proof we can give that we are believing men, is to strike with all our might in the Lord's battle on the Lord's side. Yet let us not imagine that it is only potentates like Herod and the Kaiser who can be guilty of this insolence of impiety—one does not need to stand on so high a pedestal. Everywhere there are men who in their dealing with men and with women, on the basis of hard facts (as they would say), are at any time willing to treat God and his righteousness as a cipher, who for the sake of gain or of satisfying their lust or climbing the ladder of their ambitions are

perfectly ready to run the risk of all that. And, indeed, what is all presumptuous sin but just this? It is, as St. John says, lawlessness. God says, "This is the eternally right thing for thee to do, This is the way, walk thou in it." Man says, Nevertheless I will do as I please. He waves God aside and says, I will take the risk.

Over against this atheism of arrogant self-will we have here set before us the strength of faith and its quiet rest in God. The two are set in strongest contrast; the one in its appearance of fearless, all-conquering might, the other in its seeming helplessness and failure. This has always been one of the sore problems of human experience. Peter in the prison, Herod on the throne—how often does that seem to be the *pattern of the web*. Look, one shall say, and you will see that life is just a scrambling lottery in which the prizes and the blanks fall you know not how, except that the most greedy and unscrupulous generally succeed in seizing the biggest share of the good things. Look, another shall say, and you will see that the one thing that counts is efficiency; it matters not whether a man be godly or godless, saint or devil, if only he have brain, energy, and pluck, he will enjoy the same success, and without these he will pay the same penalty of failure. And the worst of it is that so often this seems to be so true. The world does seem to have the best of the argument. It takes the risk, and before its great brazen laugh our ideals turn pallid, and our hearts are ready to falter as we seem compelled to admit that the conscienceless man is right, that the sphere of the world's successes and

failures is one in which God and his righteousness are a negligible factor. It has always been so. The Bible is full of it, full of the passionate cry, O Lord, how long? how long shall the wicked triumph, and the workers of iniquity boast themselves? No, God does not arrange events in neat packets for us to put in the scales and weigh off so much recompense against so much right or wrong. If this world is to be a place in which the just are to live by their faith, a place of moral discipline and education, we can see that it could not be so. If no Herod ever had more power than he deserves, or if the angel always came and delivered Peter, and Herod died a ghastly death, then, you might say, all men would believe. Say, rather, no man could believe. It would not be God and the right, but only the world and its power, splendour and success, to which we would own allegiance.

And yet we *know* that here, as I say again, we have the real pattern of the web. We know by the deepest instinct of our souls that Herod's power and triumph are a lie against the essential nature of things. We know that right is right and wrong is wrong, and that, whatever happens, it is not only better but immeasurably better to fight and suffer for the right, that the man who does that, win or lose, is more than conqueror, that nothing here or hereafter, in this or any other world, can alter that. But we know too that the world is built on that plan. Even had Peter not been saved from Herod's clutches, that would not have essentially altered the case. Herod, and the Jews he sought to please, and the whole system of things he stood for, were soon to fall crashing into the abyss

of judgment. The apostles, though they fell, fell as the advance-guard of Christ's conquering army. Look deeply and widely enough, and you will see that while evil may last a long time and godlessness have a successful course for many a year, at last doom overtakes it, and though it flourish like the green bay-tree, it withers from the root. At last there appears on the wall of every corrupt institution, every unrighteous policy, every dishonest man's business, every ungodly man's life, that mysterious handwriting which to those who can read it is the prophecy of open disaster and defeat. And God's soldiers, what of them? They fight, they suffer, they die for the Eternal Cause; what is their reward? To contribute to its ultimate triumph, but also to share that triumph. If we are sure of God and the Right, we are sure of Eternity too. There is no other way in which we can be sure of Eternity than by first venturing ourselves for God and the Right. This world does not show, it never will show, it is not intended to show, the complete pattern of the web. The moral order needs another world than this. The curtain does not fall at death; the last act of the drama is still to be unfolded in the hereafter.

The great question in a man's life is, what things he is sure of, and what things he is prepared to take the risk of. Herod on the one hand, the sleeping prisoner and his praying friends on the other hand, illustrate the two opposite answers men give on that question. Herod is sure of his rank and dignity and kingly authority, of his soldiers, guards and prison-houses, sure of his power to do with men like Peter

as he chooses for his own ends; and as for God and righteousness and eternity, the risk causes him no uneasiness—He does not even think of it. And there are men always whose certainties are of the same kind. Give them money-power, brain-power, health-power, and they feel that they grasp tangible realities. There they plant their feet on solid ground, and, as for the rest—well, they are not concerned. On the other hand, that handful of men and women praying all the night through, what are their certainties? And Simon Peter asleep on the dungeon-floor while men are erecting the scaffold on which he is to die—what is it that makes that a spectacle not of humiliating weakness but of triumphant peace? Just this, that sure of nothing else, they are sure of God and the right, sure of eternity, and for the other things they are willing, shall I say, to take the risk? Nay, for them when all seems most imperilled, all is most assured. Come life, come death, all things are theirs. I put it to you that theirs, not Herod's, are the real certainties. I put it to you that the first certainty given to every man, the possession of which raises him from being the mere creature of circumstances and makes him man, is that right is right, always right; and the next, that God is God, whose will of truth and right is supreme over and throughout all things; and then that, sure of the moral order established and maintained by God, we may be, and must be, sure of eternity, the harvest of earth's sowings.

These are the great spiritual issues forced upon us by the war; and these are the great certainties upon which we rest, and through faith in which we must

triumph. We did not go into this war because we were sure of victory, but because we were sure of the right, and of that all that has happened since has only made us surer. And sure of the right, we are sure of God. Let us be sure of God. Let every difficulty, every reverse, every sacrifice required, only make us surer of God, compel our faith to send its roots deeper into the faithfulness of God. Such faith and patience we need to win the long campaign; and such faith and patience, not in word, but in deed. It is not talkers but soldiers the hour demands. What God is calling for now is not men who will argue well about the faith, but men who will fight the good fight of faith, men who, like that dear and gallant lad for whom we mourn to-day (though well we know that such death as his is nothing else than victory over death), will take their life in their hands and venture all for God. Happy is every one who builds his life on those certainties—Right, God, Eternity—who builds it on Jesus Christ. That life alone is worthy of a man, and is sure, safe, and blessed, hidden with Christ in God, amid things present and things to come.

X

THE COURT OF APPEAL

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.—I Cor. 4: 3, 4. (R. V.)

The practical problem which St. Paul here deals with in so trenchant a manner is one which not only meets apostles and such like public personages, but which intimately concerns us all. Every one is a public personage on some scale. There is no one so insignificant but he is the centre of a world, though it be a tiny world, of interest and observation and comment. Each of us stands before a certain tribunal of public opinion, where his character is discussed, his conduct criticised, and his motives interpreted. And it is never a question of small importance, sometimes it becomes one of the first importance, what our attitude ought to be towards those verdicts of human opinion and social judgment.

There are two attitudes which are both wrong, and equally wrong: entire indifference and servile dependence. Here, indeed, the Apostle seems to proclaim himself serenely indifferent to what people said or thought of him at Corinth; seems to wave their irresponsible criticisms aside with some contempt. "Say on; to me it is of no vast consequence what you say:

don't imagine that I take the cackle of your bourg for the thunder of the world." But he protests too much. No one can fail to read between the lines that this was far from being his real feeling. St. Paul was the most sensitive and sympathetic and affectionate of men; his heart welled over with love and sometimes with the wrath of love. And just as a soft-fleshed mollusc grows a protective shell around its tender body, so here he unconsciously seeks to conceal under the very brusqueness of his words, yet does not succeed in concealing, how deeply he felt the disloyalty of some who owed him so much, and how sorely he was hurt by it. He was nobly independent of the praise or blame of men, but that independence was not indifference.

Indifference is never right. It is not *wholesome* for any one to be always snapping his fingers in the face of public opinion, setting at naught its conventions and standards and defying its criticisms. It makes a man hard and brutal. He takes it for strength of character, but in fact it is only weakness trying to look like strength. An aggressive and truculent independence is only a kind of inverted servility, paying unconscious and unwilling homage to what it defies.

Further, no man can *afford* to be indifferent to what his fellowmen think of him: such indifference has a way of getting itself surely avenged. How much our lives are influenced for better or worse by the opinions which others form of us, and the feelings they entertain toward us, none of us, I suppose, ever fully knows. People do not tell us all they think of us—that is a privilege reserved for our very

nearest and dearest—they do not speak; no, but they act. By some inconsiderateness in your conduct, by just yielding to the mood you are in and, as you would perhaps put it, being your spontaneous self, you give needless offence to some one; and though nothing is said, an impression is formed, and that impression is readily conveyed from one mind to another. How much of kindness and good-will, of furtherance and happiness, we may have lost through indifference to the feelings and opinions of others, or gained by the opposite, we cannot tell and can scarcely surmise. There is no more powerful and terrible tribunal on earth than that at which we daily stand to receive the judgment of our fellows, and none whose verdicts are more effective. No man is so great or so small that he can afford to ignore them.

You may say, perhaps, that this is low ground to take. Well, then, from a higher point of view I say that such indifference is not *wise or safe*. There is in us all a natural desire to stand well with our fellow-men, to see the light of kindly appreciation in the eyes of those about us. Without this feeling social life and intercourse could not exist at all; and if God has implanted it within us, it is for a wise and necessary purpose. It is a safeguard, a powerful and pungent check on our doing anything base or dishonourable in the eyes of those whose good opinion we value. Very helpful is it sometimes in the hour of temptation just to think how we should appear to others, what sorrow and shame it would bring to those whom we love and revere, were we to yield to the ignoble thing that is tugging at our hearts. Who will not acknowledge that

he has often been strongly influenced for his good by the fact that he stands before this tribunal of social judgment? And when any man, young or old, sets this at defiance he ought to make very sure that he is following the clear light of conscience and not the lure of his own vanity or obstinacy; that he is not mistaking the one for the other.

And lastly, I say that indifference to the opinion of others is not *Christian*. One of our old Scottish families has as its motto these words: "They say. What say they? Let them say." Now that is a piece of sheer paganism. Christianity develops and strengthens the individuality which sets a man apart from others, but not at the expense of the sympathies which bind us to each other. Christianity is to love your neighbour as yourself; and it is impossible that you should thus love your neighbour and be at the same time entirely regardless of what he chooses to think of you. To feel this about any human being would mean, if it were true, that every spiritual tie between you had been severed, that you and he were no more to each other than one rock to another rock—an absolutely unchristian state of things. If it were true, I say, because it scarcely ever is true. Usually it is mere affectation and bravado for a man to profess himself careless of what the world thinks of him. The only person who actually does not care is he who has become completely anti-social, the hardened and hopeless criminal. And there is one supreme example which proves that this way to moral independence—the way of indifference—is not open to us, the example, be it reverently said, of God Himself. He who is the

Moral Supreme, the Eternal I AM, who is above angels' praise, who is Judge of all—is He indifferent to what even we poor mortals think of Him? Nay, here is the marvel of His love that He cares for this supremely, ever seeking to reveal Himself to us, to dispel our erroneous and injurious thoughts of Him, sending His Christ into the world to suffer and die for us that the light of the knowledge of His glory may shine in our hearts, that we may trust and love Him, knowing Him as He is. So must it be with ourselves in our petty degree. It is only as our fellowmen know and trust and love us that we can be of most and best service to them; and we cannot, if we have anything of God in us, be indifferent to this.

All that is true and exceedingly important; and yet, even while I have been speaking, the thought has perhaps been running through your minds that most of the greatest deeds, those that have wrought most lasting good in the world, have been done by men who had to fight the world, have been done in defiance of dominant opinion, in the face of misconception and disapproval, and even of disgrace and scorn; and that, on the other hand, many of the worst deeds and basest betrayals of right have been due not to the innate criminality of those who did them, but to their weakly yielding to the pressure of external opinion. One thinks at once of Herod's murder of the Baptist, Pilate's abandonment of Christ to the cross, Peter's denial of his Lord. Far more than the falsehood of indifference, most of us are in danger from the opposite falsehood of *servile dependence*. Nothing weakens manhood more than this. There is scarcely anything

more contemptible than the bondage which some people willingly endure through their terror of social judgments. To live in constant dread of what A, B, and C will think of you and your doings is really to reduce existence to its lowest terms. It is an evil that runs through human life in many forms and grades. The moral parasite who has no conceptions of right and wrong except those he borrows; the lad whose sole ideal is what his set counts manly; the man who with no convictions of his own is always listening anxiously to hear what the crowd is cheering for, or who is just the echo of his favourite newspaper, or of the last book read, or of the circle he is at present mingling with; he who if he hears a flippant note of sceptical smartness, an idle laugh at what he calls his creed, is thrown off his unstable standing-ground and is floundering in doubt and disloyalty—how many such persons there are, like a jelly-fish drifting with wind and wave, wounded and torn by every obstacle it touches as it drifts. What valour, what honesty, what strength can there be in such a life? What but a sense, if it were felt, of meanness and cowardice and humiliation? And this is a temptation which closely besets us all, which is inseparable from human nature and human life, and by which we are apt to be subtly influenced, more than we are perhaps aware of.

We ask, then, What is the true path for our feet between these falsehoods of careless or contemptuous indifference and servile dependence? St. Paul treads it here and leaves his footprints for us to follow. Human opinion is one of the tribunals before which we stand, and it has its legitimate place and power;

but it is the lowest, and from its verdicts there is always the appeal to the higher court of conscience within and of God above. So the Apostle tells the Corinthians that their praise or blame is to him a very secondary matter. He takes the case before that court within the breast, where a man is himself both judge and jury and the prisoner on his trial, and there conscience bears him out. "I am conscious of nothing against myself."

The greatest of modern philosophers used to say that two things above all others filled him with wonder and awe: one, the vision of the starry heavens, with their revelation of the glory of God in the material universe; the other, and yet more, the human Conscience, the revelation of the moral universe in every human heart. Let us also think with wonder and awe of Conscience, of the amazing and mysterious authority which it wields. Every one knows it; no man questions it; no man can. There is the statesman in his cabinet, his brow furrowed with anxious thought as he weighs with utmost care the consequences of this and that line of policy; but should conscience speak and say, this is right and that is wrong, he knows—whatever he may do with the knowledge, he knows—that the matter is not really open to debate; the authoritative voice has said, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Or there is the man of business in his office, his brain hard at work on questions of profit and loss, schemes by which great gains seem attainable or great losses avoidable; he also, when conscience speaks, knows, however he may choose to act, that a hand has touched him with whose imperative no other can compare. There is lying within a man's reach the intoxicating cup of

pleasure, and the sea of desire within him heaves and surges; but above the tumult that "still small voice" speaks and, whether submitting to it or not, he knows that it speaks with conclusive authority. Conscience is not always infallible, and yet its right to command is unquestioned and unquestionable. It is by no means infallible; it makes grave mistakes. As the years go on our conscience comes to view some things differently—it says little for our moral progress, if it does not—yet its deliverances at the moment are those which we must accept. Another man may have a much better conscience than I; mine may be crude, ill-informed, puerile compared with his. But my conscience is my conscience; and I must not take the time of day from another man's clock. Let him be one the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose, I must not let him come between me and that inward monitor which is the voice of God to my own soul.

Here, then, amid the welter of the world's controversies and criticisms and irresponsible gossip, all the influences that would sway us this way and that, is something fixed and firm—Conscience. Without disdain for other men, obey Conscience. Without losing anything of sympathy and respect for those who differ from you, without bitterness against those who unjustly reproach you, obey Conscience. Young people, scarcely anything can be of greater moment for the right management of your life than that you should learn early to use your own conscience. Do not let it be subordinated or lost in that of your set. Dare to stand morally upon your own feet, to look at the rights and wrongs of things with your own eyes. Ask of

Him who is the true Master and Guide, What wilt thou have me to do? And when He has pointed the way, let your "eyes look right onward." Then He shall "keep you secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues," and amid all the clatter and bustle of the world He will make a great peace in your soul. Yes, when a man has the testimony of a good conscience he has wherein to rejoice. He has a strong fortress. He gets him up into a high mountain from which he can see the heavens above and the earth beneath. The mists of human misjudgment may envelop it for a time; but they are a passing thing; when they pass the mountain-top will stand out serene and clear under the sunshine of heaven.

But we need another word to make this consciousness of integrity humble and wholesome as well as strong. And St. Paul gives us that word: "I know nothing against myself, yet am I not thereby cleared. He that judgeth me is the Lord." For the judgment of the Corinthians he cares little in comparison with that of his own conscience; but there is that other supreme tribunal before which he must stand at last, before which he is standing now, and at the thought of which he bows his head in humility and solemn awe. He that judgeth me is the Lord; and far, far above the superficial estimates of men, and beyond my own estimate of myself, rises the ultimate verdict of that Judge. A company of men, of whom Daniel Webster, the great American orator, was one, were once discussing the question, What was the greatest thought that had ever passed through their minds? When it came to Webster's turn to speak, he paused a little and then said,

"The greatest thought that has ever occupied my mind is that of my personal responsibility to my Maker," and after another brief pause he rose and silently withdrew to his room. Do we ever think of it? Have we endeavoured in any way to realise our personal responsibility to God? How it dwarfs everything else!

And yet you may ask, What difference is there between following the behests of conscience and the sense of responsibility to God? After all, can we get, can we ever get, beyond Conscience? We cannot. Conscience is, and must always be, the medium through which is transmitted to us the moral imperative of God. If we ask ourselves, Am I doing right in the sight of God? the answer can come authoritatively only through Conscience. We cannot anticipate or in any way represent to ourselves what God's judgment of us is or will be, except through Conscience; nor, indeed, can God ever pronounce any judgment upon us that will be to us a moral judgment except through Conscience. We cannot follow Christ except by obeying Conscience. And yet, as every one feels, there is a vital difference between being a conscientious man and being a Christian. A vital difference in many ways, of course, but in this way in particular. Conscience is the eye of the soul; and as it is through the eye that every kind of light comes to us, bright or dim, light that leads astray or light that guides truly, so is it with Conscience. And the Christian is one whose eyes look to Christ and through whose conscience the light of Christ flows in. Or, to put it in another way, the question is, what we make Conscience of. Every one who uses his conscience must have a standard by which

he measures his character and conduct. And the Christian is one whose conscience acknowledges its standard in Christ. He makes conscience of obeying Christ, following Christ, pleasing Christ. The question he asks his conscience is, What would He have me to do, and have I done it? But more, the Christian's conscience is not only thus enlightened; it ought to be, as with St. Paul, constantly enlivened and strengthened by the sense that life is lived under that Master's eye who will at last pronounce His verdict upon it. St. Paul here likens himself to a steward, of whom what is required is that he be found faithful. And however honest a steward may be, faithfulness in his management of the estate and accuracy in his bookkeeping will be not a little stimulated by keeping before him the fact of the Master's final audit. There never was a greater enthusiast for Christ than St. Paul, and there never was a greater enthusiast for Conscience; because Christ filled his conscience. Christ, you might say, was his conscience. His conscience was his to interpret Christ's commands, to discern every beckoning or warning gesture of his hand.

And all this leads up to two great questions, with which I close. The first is, What is it to be a Christian? Is it to hand over the load of conscience to Christ, to lay us low at His feet as helpless sinners; saying, "Nothing in my hands I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling"? It is that first of all and always. "Conscience does not know of itself the way of peace; it wanders restless till it catches sight of Calvary, when its eye kindles like that of the exile who sees on the horizon the cliffs of his native land; and when it

reaches the Cross it pitches its tent there for ever." But because first of all and always Christianity is that, it is more. It is, in a single word, *loyalty* to Christ, it is to make it our life-work to do His will, to satisfy Him, to set that before us as our aim and within us as our motive. The second question is the personal one—Are we Christians? And of what sort? That question let each answer to his own conscience, in the sight of God. I say but this: Blessed are they who when accused by Conscience do not disregard the warning, but bring their burden to the merciful Saviour. And blessed are they who, trusting in Him and looking to His approval, exercise themselves to have always a conscience void of offence, who direct their footsteps not by the opinions and criticisms of men but by the voice of the Master speaking within them. They shall have their battle to fight, their crosses to bear; but they shall have "songs in the night," and shall go from strength unto strength, until they appear before their Lord, and hearing his "Well done" shall not sorrow any more at all.

XI

PROVIDENCE IN THE FALL OF A SPARROW

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.—Matt. 10: 29-31.

There is scarcely any truth more precious to religious faith than that of Divine Providence. It lays hold of us at every crisis of our personal history; it touches us every day and every hour; it includes in its scope our whole career from the cradle to the grave and to what lies beyond it. It is indispensable to the religious interpretation of life.

First, let me briefly state what this doctrine is. It is that God, who made the world, governs it by the laws He has ordained; and not only so, but governs it for spiritual ends, for the advancement of His kingdom and the spiritual benefit of mankind. It means that the natural order is adapted to our spiritual necessities; that, as directed and used by God, physical events have a spiritual purpose and message. Gravitation is not a spiritual force, but a fall due to its action may be designed to have an important place in a man's spiritual history. The wealth or poverty due to the economic law of supply and demand may be a means of rich moral culture to a human soul. And, further, the Christian belief in Providence is not merely that God's

government of the world is directed in a general way to this highest end, but that it has particular regard to every one of the millions of men, to all their actions and every happening of their lives.

Everywhere the Bible teaches or presupposes that there is such a Providence; that nothing can come into our lives, whether by the laws of nature, by our own act, or the act of our fellowman, but it comes with a Divine intention and message. But nowhere is this taught so unreservedly and enthusiastically as by our Lord himself. He boldly extends its sphere even to the lower creatures. He bids us look at the sparrows. Who would be interested in the biography of a sparrow? Who would burden himself with superintending the life of a sparrow? What value does the market set upon sparrows? Two are sold for one farthing, says one evangelist; five for two farthings, says another. These poor little sparrows are so cheap that if you take two farthings' worth you get one into the bargain. But they are God's sparrows for all that. The Infinite God, just because he is the Infinite God, cares for the sparrows. He tells the number of the stars; He takes note of all the birds that fly, and not one of them falls to the ground, by fowler's snare or winter's cold "without your Father." "Fear ye not, therefore," Jesus says with gentle, smiling irony, "ye are of more value than many sparrows. The hairs of your head are all numbered."

I. Now this great truth is like all the other great truths of religion in this—it at first staggers one. As soon as we think a little about it, it seems incredible, inconceivable; we are tempted to turn from it as an

impossible fancy. And then, as we think more deeply, the idea that at first staggered us becomes a certainty. At first, it seems impossible that it can be true; then we come to see that nothing else can be true. And here our Lord states it in the boldest, most uncompromising fashion, "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. The hairs of your head are all numbered." It seems unthinkable that an infinite Being should choose to care for such trifles; should exercise a providence over motes and atoms, sparrows and hairs. It is this thought which finds utterance in a clever writer of the present day, who, in speaking of prayer, pours ridicule upon those good people who think to detain the ear of the Almighty with their petty complainings and wearisome petitions, as if "He were some idler at a club" and had not the affairs of the universe to manage. But think a little more deeply. Is this a worthy idea of the greatness of God? Is this a tribute to His infinitude? On the contrary it is to belittle God. It is to reduce him almost to human stature. We should be astonished to hear of the head of a great firm spending days and nights in hunting up an error of a few cents in the balance-sheet; or of the Minister of Finance devoting himself to mailing the income-tax schedules, or of a commander-in-chief at the crisis of a great campaign occupying himself in drilling a squad of recruits. But this is a sign of man's littleness, not his greatness. It is because human capacity is limited, that men who have great affairs and momentous responsibilities laid upon them are excused from the burden of petty detail. It is only imperfection that makes such concentration

necessary. But when we speak of God we speak of capacity that has no limit. God would not be really God if while He rules the armies of heaven, He did not think of me; if while He kindles a star, He did not show the same perfection of thought for the tiny wayside flower; if while He governs the nations of mankind, His attention were distracted from the sparrow in its nest. It is the very glory of God, it is the prerogative of the Infinite, that he cares for these things that seem to us trifles.

But in the real truth of things, what is a trifle? Little things are great, often greater in their consequences than those of larger bulk. A little wheel, if it fall out of gear, will disable a vast and intricate mechanism. A little seed may alter the botany and agriculture of a continent. A dislodged stone in your path may seem a thing too trivial for notice; yet that stone may cause a fall, and the fall a fractured limb, and I have known the whole course of a man's life altered by a fracture so caused.

Say not "a small event!" Why "small"?
Costs it more pain that this, ye call
A "great event," should come to pass,
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power shall fall short in or exceed!

It is only little minds that can slight little things as trifles. "Trifles educate us; trifles wake our temper; trifles colour our views of truth; influence our thought; trifles combined form the warp and woof of life." There are no trifles with God; there can be none. He rules heaven and earth, but He thinks of you and yours,

of everything relating to your soul, your body, your business affairs, your domestic concerns, those small perplexities, those little interests, those transient secular cares which weigh your spirit down. His finger is upon the pulse of your life every moment. "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. Fear not, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

II. But there is another consideration which, when we think of it, seems to make the complete providence of God inconceivable. The world, we know, is governed by certain fixed and unchangeable laws, and these often act in a way that seems cruel and meaningless. Men are caught in the great wheels of Nature's machinery and are crushed by them like insects; they roll on relentlessly, like a great Juggernaut car, over our hopes and fears, entreaties and agonies. Oftentimes the government of the world looks like the work of an iron necessity much more than of paternal love and care.

We can see, indeed, that this fixedness in the order of Nature is itself the most stupendous and beneficent work of Divine Providence. It is better that every one who touches fire should be burned than that fire should sometimes be hot, sometimes cold. A rock falling upon a passer-by kills him, yet this is a vastly lesser evil than that gravitation should be uncertain in its action. It is this certainty in things—that the sun will set to-night and rise again to-morrow, that fire will burn and cold freeze, that bread will nourish life and poisons destroy it, that what we sow we shall reap—it is this that makes the world habitable. The same laws by which catastrophes occur, which, tres-

passed by human ignorance or carelessness, selfishness or greed, produce disease, poverty, degradation, death—are those which, rightly used, produce health and wealth and fill human life with blessing. “The same laws,” as Martineau says, “which are death-dealing for an hour are life-giving forever!”

So much we can see, and can calmly reason out. It is when we come to the concrete and personal application of this truth, to its bearing upon individual lives, that our faith is shaken and we are enveloped in mystery. And all that is brought home to us to-day by the paralysing event which has touched us so nearly, and has overclouded these bright summer days with a sense of tragedy we can scarcely realize. At one fell blow struck out of darkness, a thousand men and women, undreaming of danger, full of the interests, the joy and the business of life, close their eyes upon this earthly scene forever. A thousand souls, prepared or unprepared, are launched into eternity—the ardent Salvationist, bent upon his Master’s business, and the worldly trifler are taken in the same net. Hearts are broken, homes desolated, hopes are blasted, careers apparently rich in unfulfilled purpose are cut short; and all this, because of what? All for what? What does this terrible thing mean? What is God’s meaning in it? Brethren, we may interpret it in various ways. We may regard it as a further instalment of the always heavy price man has to pay for the experience that leads to improvement in his methods, as a call to more stringent precautions in the use of Nature’s powers. We may feel it as a rebuke to the proud self-reliance of the modern spirit. We have

spoken too proudly of man's conquest of Nature; and once more we see how feeble a reed man is in the midst of creation. We may feel it, and we must feel it, as a call to profound and practical sympathy, to such measures of material help as are within our power, and to the lifting up of our hearts unto God in prayer that there may be succour for the needy, comfort for the bereaved and desolate, and that out of the horror of such a calamity greater good may yet in many ways spring up.

Yet all this does not satisfy either heart or mind. We are forced back to the deeper question—what does such an event as this mean? What is the religious interpretation of it? Has it any such interpretation? Is Providence at work here at all? Shortly after the sinking of the *Titanic*, eighteen months ago, I met on the street a well-known citizen with whom I am on very friendly terms, and we naturally fell into talk about the recent disaster. "I don't believe," said he, "that the Lord had much, if anything, to do with it. The criminal rashness of man, together with the forces of nature, is responsible for the whole calamity." "Quite so," I replied. "Nevertheless, if you had been on board, or if you had had a wife or child on board, I think you would have wished to feel that the Lord had everything to do with it." "I believe you're right," he said in a suddenly altered tone. For myself, I confess this is nothing less than a religious necessity. If I cannot believe that God has a guiding and controlling hand in everything that befalls me and my fellows; if any force of nature, or action of man, can take away my life, hurt me, impoverish me, alter

my lot in any way, without God, then there is no God in whom I can absolutely trust. There might be a God of a sort, a God who might, sometimes, be in the position of having to apologize to men. "My child, I am sorry this has befallen you, but it could not be averted. You have my profound sympathy, but the machinery which has bruised and mangled you could not be stopped." There would be no God who is really *God*, of whom I can say "He is my refuge and my fortress," to whom I can trustfully say, whatever befalls, "Thy will be done." For myself, I must believe in the God Jesus believed in, the Father without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground. Only this is satisfying to the religious instincts of my nature.

Now, when we look at the lives of men individually we do not find it so hard to conceive that all their experiences and events are ordered according to a wise and loving purpose. There is always a great deal we cannot understand; yet we find it possible to believe, and feel sure, that just that path through life which is mapped out for each of us, with its rough places and its smooth, is the best adapted to help us forward to the attainment of our best possibilities. We can believe that our times are in God's hands, and that when a man suffers the stroke of mortality, it is at the right time and in the right way. But when a thousand lives are cut down by a single blow, crushed together in a fate apparently so fortuitous and undiscerning, can we believe that for each of these Providence has wrought out an all-wise design—for those who were taken, for those who are left, for all those hearts and homes that are darkened with grief, for all those

others that are filled with the grateful joy of deliverance? It is staggering. It looks so indiscriminate, so much like the outcome of some dreadful lottery. It must be a sore trial to the faith of many bereaved hearts, and it is a trial to our faith, too,—no slight trial, I confess, to my own faith, as I think of it.

And yet, brethren, when we do think of it, we feel assured that even this is possible with God. What has happened on the *Empress of Ireland*¹ is simply a condensed and crowded section, so to say, of what takes place in human life every day. The number of human lives cut short there is but an insignificant fraction of the number of human beings who die somewhere every day; and why should it be supposed that the dark archer drew his bow at a venture there rather than upon those who every hour breathe their last, each on his own deathbed? Could we bring together into one mass all the havoc, terror, agony and grief which every day are sustained by men throughout the world, there would be before us a sum, enough to repeat many times over the disaster of the stricken ship. And why should we suppose that affliction has been indiscriminately meted out there rather than elsewhere? Let us fully acknowledge the mystery which envelops such an event. Life in many things, in most things, is invested with mystery; let us learn to quiet our hearts before its mysteries. There *must be* mystery. Life, if it were not mysterious, if we could see all around it and comprehend it through and through,

¹This sermon was preached on the Sunday following the loss of that vessel.

would be a very little thing. It is not strange that God's Providence should be mysterious to us. It cannot be otherwise. This infinitely complex interweaving of Divine purpose which makes human life what it is—we cannot conceive it, cannot picture it in our imagination. But I have seen a great loom in operation, on which lace-work of most complicated design was being woven, with infallible and, as it seemed to me, superhuman dexterity; and though the process was explained to me I could not in the least grasp it. It remained an utter mystery how each of those separate threads should find its proper place in that intricate pattern; and yet it was being done before my eyes. Well, this world and all its history, all the forces of nature, all the busy thoughts and schemes of men—are God's great loom on which he is weaving the complex web of human life. We cannot follow the process; we cannot conceive how it is accomplished; we cannot reason it out in a theorem and compel all men's assent and reverence and trust. But it is a truth that confirms itself in experience. The more we trust it, the truer we find it. No one ever trusted it so utterly as Jesus Christ. No one ever felt the burden and mystery of this world as He did. He suffered, the just for the unjust, died the Elect Victim of human blindness, injustice and malignity. And he saw in it all, what? His Father's Hand and Will. His faith was unshaken, unhesitating, exultant. "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. The hairs of your head are all numbered."

III. And so the great message to us to-day is once more our need—first and last, our need of the Living

God. We are made to feel how little we know of the world we live in—what dangers may lurk in the happiest conditions, how helplessly ignorant we are of what a day may bring forth. How easily possible it had been for you or me, or for those dear to us, to have been in the place of these who went down in the dark, engulfing waters! How we are walking always on the verge of unseen good or ill! And what is our compensation? This—that we may be sure of God. We know not what shall be on the morrow, but we know Him who is the same yesterday and to-day and forever. We are made to feel what a wilderness of perils this world is to our weakness and ignorance, that we may take shelter under the wings of the Almighty, and fly to the impregnable refuge of His love and power. That is the great and blessed message Christ's Gospel bids us read in all the hazards and uncertainties of life. It sets before us the Eternal God, Ruler of Heaven and Earth, our Father, our Saviour, our Sanctuary; and to this sanctuary it bids us come by the door of penitence and childlike trust, humbling our self-confidence, turning from sin and self-will, putting our wills in line with His will, living for His ends. Then nothing in this world or any other can separate us from His love or can pluck us out of the mighty hand of His protecting care. Brethren, trust in your Father's Providence, His almighty and loving rule over you and yours and all men, and all that concerneth you and them. Let it fill your lives with sacred meaning, and with the peace that passeth understanding. There is no salvation but in God. Safety and peace are in the path of obedience. Where God calls, no

real peril, no horrible pitfall, can be. The Lord is my Shepherd—I shall not want. The Lord is my Shepherd—though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. The Lord is my Shepherd—goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

XII

A TRAGEDY OF BLUNDER

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.—Judges 11: 30, 31.

Tragedy is of various kinds. There is the tragedy of sin; nothing is so tragic as sin. But the element of tragedy in Jephthah's life did not spring from that source. He is not one of the Bible's great sinners, but one of its rudest and most untutored saints. There is the tragedy of circumstance. The dark, dread mysteries of life, the sins of the fathers visited upon the children, the innocent involved in the doom of the guilty, the happenings of time and chance to all, the vain struggle of men against a fate which draws its meshes around them like fishes taken in an evil net—such are the themes which have inspired the great tragedians both of ancient and modern times, from Æschylus to Ibsen and Hardy. But neither is this the conception which dominates the story of Jephthah and his tragic vow—the Bible does not recognize circumstance as the ruling power in human lives. There is another kind of tragedy, the tragedy of blunder. It is always a tragical thing to see men meaning well

and doing ill, striving blindly in a mist of error, making costly sacrifices for false ideals or needless sacrifices for true ideals, making themselves or others martyrs by mistake. It is under this description that the story of Jephthah comes. We may learn noble things from Jephthah. A splendour of soul shines through all his mistakes and turns the tragedy into a triumph. Immeasurably better is it to be a martyr even by mistake than to be the wise worldling who worms his way through life with no thought but of saving his own skin, and keeps his life, as Christ tells us, only to lose it. There are men whose faults are nobler than other men's virtues; and of such was Jephthah, the son of Gilead. Yet if he is a hero, he is the hero of a tragedy, a tragedy of blunder.

His early history reveals him as a strong and resolute personality, overcoming in the power of native manhood grievous disadvantages of fortune and ill-usage by men. Coming into the world under the cloud of illegitimacy, spurned by his insolent brothers, buffeted about by all men, at his father's death left portionless and homeless, Jephthah shakes the dust of Gilead from his feet, and betaking himself to the land of Tob, just across the border, establishes himself as a Hebrew Robin Hood among the mountains. But, outlaw though he was, his character as well as his valour must have gained for him no less admiration than notoriety; for when the king of Ammon insolently demands a large slice of Hebrew territory and threatens war, what can the elders of Gilead do, at their wits' end for terror, but appeal to the patriotism of the redoubtable Jephthah, and send for the man

they had cast out, to come back and fight their battles for them.

Now from the day he was intrusted with the captaincy of Israel Jephthah became a better man, deeper, more serious, humble-minded and godly than ever he had been. His whole nature is deeply stirred by the crisis. He feels as never before his utter need of God, his helplessness, the futility of all his valour and his skilful stratagems, without God. And so, says the historian, he "uttered all his words" before the Lord in Mizpeh. He laid before the Lord all his schemes, his whole plan of campaign; and, as Luther once plainly told the Lord that He Himself, and not the poor monk, Martin Luther, must save His Church, so Jephthah told the Lord that he would not face this battle, not a step would he march, not a sword would he draw, unless he could be sure of God. And how was he to be made sure of God? In this wise: Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it for a burnt-offering."

Here is the first act in Jephthah's tragedy of blunder. He thought that God could be bribed; needed, indeed, to be bribed and bought to support the righteous cause—Jephthah's cause. I am not now speaking of the hideous nature of the inducement offered, a human sacrifice (for there seems no reason to doubt that this was the intention of the vow); but simply of this,

that Jephthah had such a conception of the God he worshipped as to suppose that He was open to inducement, and needed an inducement, to help and prosper the righteous cause. Well, let us not blame Jephthah for this. Don't dare, one of you, to throw a stone at Jephthah for these crude thoughts and imaginings. Such was the theology of his rude, semi-barbarous age. Far rather lay to heart the magnificent truth which those Old Testament saints and heroes so magnificently teach us—that the one thing a man needs to be sure of is God. That at any rate those men of the Old Testament knew right well. There they trod firmly. They did not, like our pious ancestors, carve "Except the Lord build the house" on their door-lintels, but they wrote it on their hearts, they wrote it upon the threshold of every seed-time and every harvest, of every battle they fought, every enterprise which they put their hands unto. And they stand there, in their histories and psalms and prayers, the appointed teachers of that truth to all men in all ages. Let us learn it.

But learn too from Jephthah's mistake. That detestable idea, the root-idea of all paganism—that idea of bargaining with a Higher Power, of trying to bring God over to our view, of coaxing God by prayers and entreaties, or by vows and promises, to be of our mind and to give us what we want, though the Gospel of Christ has struck at the root of the lie, is never wholly extinct. I say to you, seek like Jephthah to make sure of God as your leader and ally through all the long campaign of life. Say to Him, the battle is not mine, but Thine. Say like Moses, "Except thou

go with me, carry me not up hence; I dare not and I will not venture the journey alone." Make sure of God. Yes, but how? There is one only way. In the nature of the case there can be but one way, one infallible and most blessed way. God cannot come over to our view and our way. We must go over to His. God cannot change, cannot be conformed to us; we must be conformed to Him. The source of all our human unrest and fear is that we seek not the Kingdom of God, but the kingdom of self. Other foundation can no man lay than this—Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. If we can but build upon that! If we only have the heart, the courage in us, to build all upon that—so to live for God's ends that what concerns us will even more concern Him, that His interests will be our interests, and ours His; that our defeat would be His defeat and our victory will be His triumph; that He and we are one in holy alliance, and no dividing wedge can be driven between, nothing separate us from the love of God! That is the place of victory to which we have entrance in Jesus Christ, and into which God is ever seeking to bring us more decisively and completely by all the conflict and discipline of our lives. "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright." Only pray and see to it that the way of the Lord be your way, and all your striving will be a striving together with God, in God's strength; all things will be leagued together to help you onward; even things that seem only baffling and irritating and hurtful, the events we call misfortunes, will only guide into a more fruitful path the life of the man whose will is to do the will of God.

But another great truth, and another blundering interpretation of that truth, are seen in the story of Jephthah's terrible vow. There is the truth of *sacrifice*. Jephthah was under no illusions. He knew that there is a price, a high price to pay for all high achievement. He was no shallow-souled dilettante. He had been in no haste to put his hand to the plough, but when he did so, it was with the resolve to plough the furrow to the end, though it should be by wading in blood. Nor did he dream of delivering Israel only by the sacrifice of others. The rough old hero had looked deeply into the heart of life, and knew full well that his call to be the deliverer of his people was not a call to easy victory and cheap glory. It was a call to suffering, to fierce struggle, to

iron sacrifice
Of body, will, and soul;

and he was ready to pay the price. So, in the fervour of his devotion he vows, "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, I will offer it for a burnt-offering." Again, look past the blundering form of the thing, and open your hearts to the eternal truth of it, that the condition of all spiritual victory, all effectual service, every true deliverance wrought in the earth, is sacrifice. It is a truth which may be unpalatable. People for the most part are willing to follow the right rather than the wrong, as a matter of mere preference; but when to do so requires sacrifice, many do not feel that this can be reasonably expected of them; many are willing to give a trifle of their means and a small portion of their time and interest

to the service of God's Kingdom; but that this should be carried to the point of sacrifice, of subtracting aught from their comfort or their freedom in other directions, is a doctrine they cannot receive. Frankly and unashamed, as if stating an axiom that can be questioned by no rational person, they will tell you that a man's first duty is to himself, and only in so far as it does not interfere with that, can one be expected to help in the good cause. But Jephthah knew the eternal law of things. Salvation of any kind costs. It comes never by water only, but by blood also. Life is won only by life laid down. No true work can be done in this world without sacrifice, no true battle fought, no real progress achieved. You cannot effectually help a single soul nor lighten its burden except by putting your own soul under the load. And Jephthah's heart leaps up in fervent response to this truth. He consecrates his leadership with sacrificial vow. Strong in his compact with God and with his own soul,

Burningly offered up, to bleed,
To bear, to break, but not to fail,

he goes out to battle with the Ammonites. Can we wonder that Jephthah won the day?

But now we reach the climax of the story, so overwhelming in its pathos and tragic power, when Jephthah has to pay the price. He comes home in triumph, and "his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and dances; and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter." In all literature I know nothing more poignant than these simple words: "She was his only child; beside her he had neither son

nor daughter." They seem to reveal to us the one sweet paradise in a rough, hard life. Dishonoured and disinherited, a kinless outcast and exile, he had found in her love and her fair budding womanhood the solace of his lonely heart, the light of his lonely home. Her bright presence, her affection and girlish laughter had become the natural music of his life. And now she sallies forth to meet him, clad in her gayest apparel, her face radiant with joyous excitement, her timbrel clashing to the chant of triumph, as she leads the merry troop who hail her father—her father—chief and victor, Israel's captain and deliverer. At the sight, what horror freezes his very soul! How, in a moment, the sunshine is blotted out, and the world becomes the valley of the shadow of death! He looks at the gay young figure with blind stupor in his eyes; and then as feeling rallies from its swoon, words wrench themselves out of his agony: "Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me." The appalling truth is told, and Jephthah says: "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." Was it not sublime? "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." Surely such words are a heritage for ever. In all likelihood Jephthah's vow was a private one. The compact was between his own soul and God alone. And we know how men are apt to treat such vows. Under the pressure of some crisis in our lives, in some distress of soul, when a calamity or humiliation is threatening that makes our faults stand out in letters of fire, we vow amendment. Never again will we yield to that temptation; we will be

more serious, more prayerful, more mindful of our walk with God. But when the crisis is over and feeling sinks back to its normal level, how do our lives slide back insensibly into the old groove! Our vows and resolutions, how often are they writ in water! And Jephthah might have found pretexts enough to absolve him from his rash and terrible vow. Our power of casuistry would be easily equal to inventing them for him. But his true heart would have none of them. He had vowed that he would save his people at whatever cost to himself; he had opened his mouth to the Lord, and could not go back.

But his daughter—she had given no consent to the bargain. Will she not on her part repudiate its obligation? protest that she at any rate had not opened her mouth to the Lord? Will she not rebel against being made the price of her misguided parent's too fervent devotion? She does not even murmur. When Jephthah told her of his vow, and why he had made it, she understood; her spirit caught flame from his; she was a soldier's and a patriot's child, and shared to the full his exalted passion. Proudly she recognised that her life was the price of Israel's deliverance. Was it not a soldier's glory to give his life for the salvation of his people, and should it be less the glory of Jephthah's daughter? And as she looked up into her sorely stricken father's face, with the gleam of a heroism matching his own in her eyes, she said: "Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon." We are here among the high mountain-

peaks of life. That rugged Hebrew bandit and his child—how their loyalty to truth, their power of self-devotion to the uttermost, their unflinching resolve to go all the way, to pay the full price, the price of blood, for God and duty and fatherland—how these things thrill us to-day. They transfigure with a heavenly light the dark tragedy of their fate. Human nature, as we sometimes see, can sink very low; but such deeds and such tempers as these lift us up; they declare to us how far we can go and how high we can rise; they allure all that is truest and noblest in us, and beckon us onward to the far horizon.

And yet we cannot but see in it all, blunder, the tragedy of blunder. Jephthah stands there an unforgettable warning against the blunder of the gratuitous, self-appointed sacrifice. We have been well forewarned that to follow Christ we must take up our cross; but to find or make a cross is no part of the Christian's calling. If we follow Christ, the right cross, let us never fear, the cross we need, the cross that will never injure but only bless us all our life through, will *find us*. It will plant itself in the way which duty bids us take, so that there will be no missing it except by turning aside from the right way. The self-appointed cross is always a blunder. It is instructive to compare John Bunyan and his daughter with Jephthah and his daughter. Think of Bunyan in jail, brooding over his blind Mary, the favourite of his heart. "Poor child," thought I, "what sorrow art thou like to have for thy portion in the world! Thou must be beaten, must beg, suffer hunger, cold, nakedness, and a thousand calamities, though I cannot now

endure the wind should blow upon thee. But yet I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you. Oh! I saw, I was as a man who was pulling down his house upon the heads of his wife and children; yet I thought on those two milch kine that were to carry the Ark of God into another country and to leave their calves behind them." Bunyan's sacrifice was as real, as sublime as Jephthah's. But the one, appointed by the All-wise Will, brought no regrets in its train, but gave birth to the Pilgrim's Progress; the other, an arbitrary appointment of man's own will, was a tragedy, relieved only by the heroism which sustained its agony. Our proper cross, I say, will always find us. When we put our lives outright into Christ's hands, when we ask him to be our Master and Guide, He says to us as of old, "Ye know not what ye ask." We know not what trial or discipline we are inviting—we know only that to be near Him is to be near the fire—but it is for Him to send it, for us to accept it when it is sent. And be sure, this is a far more *testing* thing, demanding far more faith and humility and self-surrender, than to practise all the self-imposed austerities of the ascetic.

Finally, in a sentence it may be said that there runs through Jephthah's story the mistaken idea as to what true sacrifice is, and that in it we see that idea in its most dreadful form—the idea that the one way by which a human life may be completely devoted to God's service is by slaying it and putting an end to its activities. "I beseech you by the mercies of God," says the New Testament, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." In the scenes of busy labour, in the paths of anx-

ious toil, in the hour of temptation, in sorrow and in joy, sickness and health, in abundance and in poverty; in all these to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God, to say, "Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will"—this is the Christian sacrifice. To such sacrifice we are called and appointed. Let us not forget it. Jephthah was wrong, hideously wrong in his theology; nevertheless he was nobly right in his spirit. He did the best he knew; he gave to God the best he had. God grant to you and me that with our purer faith and Christian enlightenment we may act as loyally! Let us take away in our hearts the abiding truth, that our lives are not our own to give or to withhold, or to spend as we choose on selfish whims or for petty aims. They are claimed by the Infinite Love. They are dignified, they are consecrated by the Blood of Divine Sacrifice; and to know Christ, and follow Him, and do His work and fight His battles and share His victory, we must live the sacrificial life. Christian men and women, we have opened our mouth unto the Lord, and we cannot go back.

XIII

THE WONDER-WORKING GOD

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts.—Zech. 8: 6.

In this chapter Zechariah describes the city of his dreams, the Jerusalem that is to be. His imagination does not rise to the apocalyptic sublimities of the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah; the picture is simple, homely, lifelike. Peace shall once more reign within the walls of the Holy City, and prosperity in her palaces. The exiles will return from the rising and from the setting of the sun. The days of struggle and poverty will be ended, and fasts will be changed into cheerful feasts. Religion will flourish, and the blessing of Heaven will rest so manifestly upon the new Israel that in those days ten men of all languages will take hold of the skirts of a Jew and say, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." But there is nothing else in the description so arresting and exquisite as the glimpse given of the streets of the new Jerusalem. It is not the magnificence of buildings, nor the ceaseless flow of traffic, nor the profuse display of varied merchandise in the bazaars that entrances the prophet's eye. He sees there happy, contented old men and women sitting in the warm sunshine, every one leaning on his staff for very age, while around them troops of boys and girls enliven

the scene with the frolics and sports of childhood. Evidently this is intended as a bright contrast to the state of things in the city as it then was. The Jerusalem of Zechariah's time was a colony of immigrants. The population would consist disproportionately of men, young and in middle age. Life was hard and strenuous, and the struggle for existence gave little encouragement to marriage and the rearing of children, while it allowed few to reach the haven of sheltered old age. The conditions were such as you might still find in some of our pioneer settlements—a rough, hard society where only the strongest can find a place, unblessed by those softening and refining influences, childhood and old age. But in the future all this will be changed. In the peaceful days to come, the aged whose day of toil is past will have their seat and their hours of quiet talk in the sweet morning sunshine, while the merry diversions of their children's children bring back to them the memory of their own long-past youth.

But would these idyllic scenes ever be more than a dream? Zechariah sees a look of stolid incredulity on the faces of his hearers. "Ah!" these hardset, careworn faces seem to say, "this Jerusalem of yours is a city in the clouds, and in the clouds it will remain. Prophets a many before you have dipped their brush in sunshine and painted a golden future—and what has come of it all? We are grown too bankrupt in hope to listen to your tale of wonders." And Zechariah has his answer for them. "Is it wonderful in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days; should it also be wonderful in mine eyes, saith the

Lord of hosts?" "Do you make your own limited conceptions the measure of His possibilities? Is He not a God that doeth wonders? Is not that His character, His history? Are not wonders, so to say, His daily bread? If it be wonderful in your eyes, does it follow that it should be wonderful in His?"

Here is a great truth for us to ponder, and like all great truths it is very simple and elementary; there is nothing recondite or far-fetched in it. But it is one of the pillars of life, and if we can but grasp it, and take it as a living truth into our souls, it will many a time change our outlook upon life and put a new spirit into our religion. Nothing is wonderful, in the sense that it is surprising, except in relation to the power that does it. As a child gazes with astonishment at the feats of a full-grown man, as the commonplace of civilisation is nothing short of a miracle to the untutored savage, and as it is only natural that this should be the case, so ought we to *expect* that in a world created and conducted by God we shall constantly meet with what seems to us marvel, processes beyond our comprehension and results beyond our hopes. God's commonplaces are our marvels; our marvels are God's commonplaces.

In the first place let us for a little consider the fact. God not only has done things great and marvellous in the past, He is constantly doing them. We think it marvellous that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But heaven and earth are as full of marvel and mystery at this moment as when God created them. "I saw not long since a sign in the heavens," writes Luther at a time of great dis-

couragement. And what was the portent? What blazing comet, meteor or celestial apparition? "I was looking out of my window," he continues, "and beheld the stars and the whole majestic vault of heaven, without being able to see the pillars on which the Lord has caused it to rest." Just that ancient miracle which the heavens have been showing nightly to men since the heavens were, which we may gaze upon out there as we leave the church this evening. Men dispute about miracles. Miracles don't happen, they say. Why, they are happening all the time. If by miracle you mean what is in its nature absolutely marvellous, what defies analysis and passes comprehension, what brings you face to face with an inscrutable power which works behind and within all things, the direct power of the living, wonder-working God, I say that miracle is everywhere. Every "flower in the crannied wall," every blade of grass, every motion of your own body in obedience to your will, is a miracle. Existence itself, the mere fact that we are, or that anything is, seems to me the greatest miracle of all. You cannot try to think of any least thing down to the root of it without finding yourself in the presence of the divine mystery; and it is only because we do not think that we become blind to the marvel of God's commonplaces. Every morning God says "Let there be light," and every morning is just as wonderful as the first. Every year God says, "Let the earth bring forth grass and herb yielding seed after its kind," and every springtime with every sprouting seed and swelling bud is as much the work of incomprehensible divine power as the first. God said, "Let us make man in our own image,

after our likeness"; and God is still making man after His own image. The birth of every babe is as mysterious and divinely wonderful as the creation of Adam.

The works of man astonish by their novelty; but the works of God are only the more wonderful the more they are inquired into. Men were for a time amazed by the telegraph and the telephone, just as the savage is by simple writing. By-and-by, however, the sense of wonder wears off as completely in the one case as in the other. But if you will only think of God's great commonplace that lies beneath all these devices of man, the mystery of thought and language, the power to conceive and express thought and feeling, and to transmit these from mind to mind, you will find it matter for inexhaustible marvel. Science itself only enables us to perceive more clearly that the great divine commonplaces are the true miracles.

And again in God's *guidance of human life* we constantly discover matter for deep wonder. How utterly marvellous are the intertwinings of providential plan even in a single human life! How wonderfully God guides men, so that they have to confess that their best things have come to them by no contrivance of their own, and as they look back upon the path they have travelled are convinced that a wisdom not their own, but mysterious and divine, has directed their steps! But all these things, marvellous to us, are, so to say, God's routine and beaten track. It is His everyday work to lead the blind by a path that they know not; to make darkness light before them, and crooked

things straight. He holds by the right hand, He guides with His eye; He brings through fire and water into a wealthy place. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. How God holds in His own hand all the threads with which men weave the web of history, and so holds them as to control the pattern of the web, is beyond the comprehension of finite minds. Yet all this is only God's commonplace.

But above all else marvellous are the *moral miracles* God constantly works. What else in this world is so wonderful as the conversion of a sinner, the begetting of a new spirit at the centre of life? When the proud man becomes humble as a little child, the greedy generous, the blasphemer devout, when men and women are lifted out of the mire of worldliness or sensualism, are baptised and cleansed by the fire of a heavenly love, what marvel is there in the creation of new stars or suns to compare with this new moral creation? In the fact that a man can turn his back not only upon his former life but upon his former self, there is something illogical, something the depth of which at least the plummet of our human logic cannot sound. If there is anything equally marvellous it is only the further triumphs of God in the redeemed life. When we see men resisting seductive temptations because they believe in a God they have never seen, content in poverty, humble in wealth, at peace amid heart-shaking commotions, because God is theirs—when we think what men and women of common clay like ourselves have done and suffered as seeing Him who is invisible and for a heaven beyond the clouds, we have before us the most marvellous spectacle earth has to

show. Yet all this is nothing marvellous in God's eyes. It is nothing extraordinary with him to make the weakest more than conquerors. It is God's commonplace.

Now, what Zechariah reproached the people of Jerusalem with was that they ignored all this. The vision of the new Jerusalem he held up to them was marvellous, and *therefore*, they argued, unlikely to be true. They were unable to conceive how it could be realised, and therefore they were incredulous of its ever being realised. And that is how we ourselves reason, almost invariably and on every kind of subject. We make our own minds, our own ideas, the measure of all things. If another Zechariah were to come to us with another such prophecy, were to predict such a development of spiritual power in the Churches that within this generation the whole world would be evangelised, that this people from the Atlantic to the Pacific should become a really Christian nation, that war should become as extinct as the duel, a new baptism of spiritual fervour sweep away the evils and corruptions of society, and a new era of spiritual progress be inaugurated on the earth, such a message would find most of us secretly sceptical or openly incredulous. Now, why is this? What is it that keeps men, even those who believe in God, from living in the expectation, the natural and rational expectation, of His doing marvels?

One cause is that we reason, or imagine that we reason, from experience. We say, What has been will be. And to reason from experience is as unobjectionable as it is inevitable. Inductive logic gives

sound guidance. But with what warrant from experience itself do we thus discount the marvellous, or even the unprecedented? What would have been the history of the world and of the Church had it been always determined by previous experience? No Christ would ever have come into the world; the Christian Church would never have come into existence; no Reformation, no rise of Foreign Missions could have taken place; no onward movement whatsoever. History would have been frozen at its source, strangled in its cradle. Take just the one supreme example. What fantastic lunacy had it seemed to tell Pilate that the man he scornfully abandoned to the Cross would be raised to such honours as no Cæsar ever received—to tell the crucifiers of Christ that that cross they were erecting and should take down again before sunset would be the spiritual centre of humanity, to which all nations and generations would turn for hope and healing. Reason from experience? Yes. But what experience teaches is that we must not leave the wonder-working God out of the reckoning. The page of experience itself is written all over with marvels, the wonderful, unexpected, unprecedented works of God. The history of God's Kingdom in this world is largely a history of seeming impossibilities turned into facts, a proof that the very law of the divine procedure contains the element of surprise, of the incalculable, of apocalyptic crises breaking in upon the steady march of things. "Is it marvellous in your eyes? Should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord." We greatly need to learn that ancient lesson. We limit God. We measure God's to-morrow by our own

yesterday. We are ready to stop when He has scarcely begun. We fall into a habit, an almost cynical habit, of assuming that the growth of good must be very slow—almost imperceptible—if it advance at all, of guarding ourselves against disappointment by expecting little—certainly nothing marvellous. And this comes down like a heavy freezing fog upon our Christian life; it reduces our Christian service to the character of a stereotyped routine and sometimes a mechanical “pegging away.” We need to be delivered from this. There are few things that I feel I need, and that you need, and that the whole Church needs more to be delivered from than this dull, leaden weight of inexpectancy. It may be a paradox, but it is true, that we ought to expect God to astonish us by the outstretching of His holy arm.

Another reason¹ why we do not expect things great and marvellous is that we *think more of our own working than of God's*. Our own efforts after good we know, and we know how fitful and half-hearted they are, and what a poor thing is our own striving after a purer and higher life. Therefore, knowing our own force, and not thinking of God's, we settle down to small expectations. How many of us are there who seriously expect to be ever wonderfully better than they now are? We say in our thoughts: I will try

¹This is only another aspect of the same reason. Both are included in the fact that we have come to believe one-sidedly in the immanence of God, while we have ceased to believe vividly in his transcendence. I wish to acknowledge some indebtedness in this paragraph to Dr. Leckie's fine sermon on *Marvels and Prayer*.—*Sermons*, p. 59.

to live a decent, average life. We believe that power to be in us. But any call to stretch out the withered hand, any call to enthusiasm, to devoutness, to chivalrous self-devotion, leaves us cold. It sounds unreal. We cannot picture ourselves in that character. That we should become such persons would be marvellous in our eyes; and we forget that God has to do with it, we do not ask whether it would be marvellous also in his eyes.

There is a common saying, a phrase we often use regarding any brilliant hope or suggestion of great good. Sometimes lightly, sometimes with a sigh, we say, "*It is too good to be true.*" If we use these words with real meaning, are they not the most profoundly atheistical words man can utter? What a verdict upon life it is; that any good thing, that would bring men great happiness and blessing, is too good to be true! How singular a commentary upon our faith in God! If there is a God of boundless love, in whom all live and move and have their being, a God who can do "great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number," many things might be too bad to be true (the puzzle, indeed, is to see why any bad thing is true and how in the end any bad thing can be true), but that anything is good, superlatively, amazingly, almost inconceivably good, surely that is the strongest reason why it ought to be; aye, must be and will be true.

If there is some one here who feels himself entirely impotent in the grasp of a besetting sin, and sees himself doomed, carried irresistibly onward to the cataract; and if it be said to him, as I say to him now—

"This need not be. You may be rescued from the fate that you see lying before you, rescued and saved even now by the power of the living Christ who is near to all that call upon Him, so that you may go forth from this church to-night with your hand in His and your face turned towards the light," let him not set this aside with the old melancholy falsehood—"too good to be true." If there is any one in trouble, shut up in a narrow place out of which no way is visible, and it is said to him, as I now say, "Be of good cheer. God does wonderful things; He can open up a way where none is to be seen; in the most desperate case He can provide," let him not shake his head and repeat the old faithless formula—"too good to be true." If it were said to the preacher, "God will use you to lead many souls to Christ, and to cheer and strengthen many in fighting a good fight"; if it were said to the Sunday-school teacher, "God will wonderfully bless your work to the boys or girls in your class"; if it were said to the Church of Christ, "God is about to pour out a plenteous heavenly baptism upon you, which will make you glow and shine with new life," should we say these things were too marvellous? Is it not just these marvellous things we should expect a wonder-working God to do?

Let us grasp this as an operative truth, that our marvels are God's commonplaces, and it will be newness of life. It will give new life to prayer and to our service of God's Kingdom. To live in the expectation that the greatest difficulties may be wonderfully overcome, the greatest evils wonderfully put down, the worst sinners wonderfully led to repentance, and the

weakest wonderfully strengthened, and that everywhere and by all means God's Kingdom may be wonderfully advanced—this would put new joy and power into our souls. And, as regards our personal lot, to live in the belief that God will do wonderful things for us, that He will raise us out of our difficulties or give us strength to conquer them, that He will send quickening to our souls, that we are always on the verge of better things—how this would lift us above care and fear and heavy dulness of spirit. But, am I inviting you to live in a rose-coloured dreamland? It is not so. I am inviting you to come out of the narrow cavern of your own limited ideas and experiences into the wide sunlit realm of God's glorious possibilities and promises. If we do we shall find there the abiding realities; in the end we shall find nothing too good to be true. Not that we shall have no disappointments—we assuredly shall—but the reason of any disappointments we may have will be this only; not that what we hoped was too good, but that it was not good enough, to be true, that for every good we set our hearts upon God has a better to offer us, and will lead us by our very disappointments to higher conceptions of good, to purer desires and better prayers. The sum of all is that we cannot take too bright a view of our own future, the Church's future, the world's future, when in the centre of that view we place Jesus Christ crucified, risen and enthroned. Nothing can be too good to be true. It may be marvellous in our eyes; but it is not marvellous in the eyes of Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

XIV

THE FALL OF JERICHO

(A Missionary Sermon)

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.—Heb. 11: 30.

Certainly it was by faith, great faith, it was done, if it was done at all. The desert march was over; the Jordan safely passed; all was ready for an advance into the heart of the land. But there, straight in front, lay a mighty obstacle, the walls and ramparts of Jericho rising among the palm-groves. By this massive lock the door of the country was at once closed against the invaders. That lock must be forced, or they must fail and perish on the threshold of their enterprise.

Scarcely could faith be put to a severer test. The end in view was the capture of a fortified city, and the means to be employed the blowing of trumpets in a daily procession around its walls. What could be more grotesque? What relation, what conceivable connection of cause and effect could there be between the blowing of trumpets and the overthrow of massive fortifications? As the defenders of the city saw the absurd procession wending its way around the walls day after day, they must, if they had any inkling at all of its design, have looked upon it as the procedure of lunatics. "Blow your trumpets till your cheeks

crack," they might have shouted from the ramparts. If the enemy was capable of no more serious kind of warfare than this, Jericho might defend itself with laughter. Perhaps, however, the inhabitants of Jericho may have surmised that this singular demonstration was not intended to have any military significance or efficacy. It was an act of worship, a calling forth of unseen powers. The blowing of the sacred trumpets by the priests was a symbolic act by which Israel invoked the mercy and aid of Jehovah. Jericho, we may truly say, was captured by a week of prayer. Whether we regard the narrative as historical or as legendary, as prose or as poetry, makes no real difference; what matters is the permanent spiritual truth it embodies. "Providence," said Napoleon in the famous maxim which expresses so cynically the materialist's view of life, "Providence is always on the side of the biggest battalions." But Israel was to be the apostle to the world of the truth, and had first of all to learn for itself the truth, that God is God, and that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to shame the mighty, and the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are"; that no Jericho is ever overthrown except by faith, no true fight is ever fought or true victory won except by men who count upon an unseen omnipotence.

It is only by the same faith, and the same test and triumph of faith, that the Church's warfare, which has its type in those wars of the Israelites, is to be carried on to victory. What is our Jericho? It is the sin, the pride, the intrenched materialism of the world. To

capture that Jericho is the work which the Church of Christ has to do for its King. And its own existence depends upon its accomplishing this task; it must conquer or itself ultimately perish. Its objective is to win for Christ the millions who in Christian lands live in virtual or avowed godlessness, in contempt of any religious and spiritual ideal; to overthrow strong and ancient systems of false religion which are enthroned over the continents of heathenism; to attack and conquer selfishness, vice and greed in their very stronghold, and, as it was said of old, to "turn the world upside down." And what forces, asks calculating reason, what weapons do we possess for such an enterprise; what equipments of war adequate to the siege and to pulling down the battlements of such a Jericho? Reasoning from the apparent adequacy of means to effect, we should have to acknowledge that we have none. It is true that we can no longer say of the Church what St. Paul said of it in his day, that not many wise, not many well-born, not many influential people, are included in its ranks. Its resources in men and money, learning and eloquence, zeal and devotion, are no longer despicable; for any other purpose than the spiritual regeneration of men and society they would constitute a most formidable power. But for this—and I do not know that there is any truth of which the preacher and the whole Church need more to have a living conviction and realization—for this, for the conversion of a single soul, they avail no more than would a trumpet-blast of itself avail to bring down the walls of Jericho.

It is not surprising that men who regard our efforts

from the world's point of view, who listen to our trumpet-blowing or its echoes without sharing our faith, are sometimes moved to ridicule, sometimes to irritation, asking, like Judas, To what end is this waste? Why build churches when money is needed for the better housing of the poor? This procession of trumpet-blowers, this torrent of talk, pouring itself out without ceasing in pulpits, Sunday-schools, and mission-halls, this perpetual reiteration of old-world myths and moralisings, of hackneyed but incomprehensible doctrines and threadbare precepts, this eternal preaching under which people yawn and grumble and wrangle—what nonsensical folly all this is! And foreign missions! to entertain the hope that by sending out a handful of missionaries to do these same futile things abroad we shall change the ancestral beliefs, customs, and morals of whole nations, need we wonder that men of the world, aye, and half-believing Christians as well, count us fools for our pains? And it is well for all of us sometimes to pause in the routine of our Christian service and ask ourselves why we do these things, why it is rational to do them and to continue doing them. Why do we preachers preach? Why do we and why ought we to go on doing it? Why do we and why ought we all to exert ourselves for the spread of the Gospel? What do we expect from it, and what is the ground of our expectation? My brethren, one thing alone can justify it to rational men, the faith by which the walls of Jericho fell, faith in the Living God, in the transcendent power and activity of the Living God, in the promise and working of the Spirit, along with and

through yet above and beyond all human effort, to make our message His power unto salvation. It is this that makes the preaching of the Gospel a calling to be engaged in by men who seriously wish to make the most and best of their lives. If I did not believe this I do not think I should again enter a pulpit. I should betake myself to some more useful occupation than that of trying to change men's very selves by preaching to them, even preaching the Gospel of Christ.

Without God no means are adequate to this work. But with God, with the mightiest power in the universe at work, the Spirit, the quickening breath of the Living God, what means can be too feeble to accomplish his will? God is not as man. Man needs large equipments for doing little things. He needs a quarry to build a cottage; a coal mine, and another of iron ore, to make a single nail. God does great things with the most unpretentious agencies. He grows the oak from the acorn; He sets the coral-insect to build an island. The stone which the builders rejected is made head of the corner. The trumpet is blown and the walls of Jericho fall. Yes, let us consider well the significance of that wondrous siege of Jericho, and take fresh hold of the truth that our part is this, to keep marching around the walls ("Go ye into all the world") and to keep the trumpets sounding ("Preach the Gospel to every creature"), and to keep our hearts lifted up to Him who has said, "Lo, I am with you always."

But there is another great truth here. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, *after they were compassed*

about seven days." The victories of the Kingdom are won by a power which transcends all human calculation and effort, but which nevertheless works through human effort, and especially by the *cumulative effect of persistent effort*. Think of the story. The children of Israel went out as they were bid, and made their procession around the city-walls. But nothing happened; not a stone of these walls was loosened. And on the second day, and on the third day, and on to the sixth day, the walls of Jericho apparently stood as they had always stood. Then the seventh day came; and be sure the time was long to men engaged on so perilous an enterprise. The seventh day came, and once, twice, six times, the monotonous circuit was made. Yet there was no sign of success. Not a gap, not a fissure was to be seen in those frowning fortifications. What if the besiegers had even then given way to discouragement? All would have been lost; all their previous efforts rendered fruitless. Even the seventh encompassing of the city seemed to be equally unavailing until the last moment, and men's hearts were throbbing hard with suspense. But the appointed hour struck; the strokes of the great hammer of God's judgments rang out above the doomed city; and in a moment persevering faith received its long-delayed reward—the walls of Jericho fell in the crash of irretrievable ruin.

The truth which, as it seems to me, this narrative is intended specially to teach is the *cumulative* effect of continued effort. The broad statement is frequently made that no good word fitly spoken, no loving work done, no particle of good influence exerted can fail

of its due result. And we are bound to believe—I trust we do—that in the ultimate reckoning this will be found to be true, that no seed of good is sown to be finally fruitless, that every Christlike thought even thrills somehow through the world, and unites itself to the current of God's redeeming purpose. But that every separate attempt to do good succeeds by itself, in its own right, as it were, and not as part of a cumulative whole, is quite obviously untrue. How many sermons immediately effect what they aim at? How much of all our Christian effort? Consider the vast output of effort, prayer, and holy influence on the part of Christian men and women year by year, the many organizations all at work for the conflict with evil and the uplifting of the community. Why, if all this definitely and directly succeeded in its purpose, there would be a gloriously speedy clearance of the world's sins and woes. Within a generation there would not be a drunkard, a libertine, a pauper, an unbeliever, a God-forgetting person in the world. And yet it is most true that nothing done in faith and love is ever done in vain—no, nothing—if only it be repeated often enough, if only we grow not weary in well-doing.

When I look at the walls of Jericho I learn that. I see there the sure and grand success of cumulative effort. The first day's work seemed fruitless, and by itself would have been absolutely fruitless; and the second day's, and the third. Was the only effectual work, then, that of the seventh day? In a sense it was—without it all had been in vain. But, note this, the efficacy of the seventh day's assault depended

upon, and included in itself, that of all the preceding days. It was the seventh blow of the hammer that split the stone; but that blow did it, because it was the seventh. And it is so in almost every good work and noble enterprise. All that is done for a long time may appear to be but lost labour. Yet it all tells on the final result, and is all indispensable to it. Unsuccessful to all superficial estimation, it is laying the unseen substructures of a great and apparently sudden triumph, when almost in a moment God's harvesters reap the fruit of long dim years or decades or even centuries. Take for example an epoch like the Reformation. It seemed to come on the world like a thunder-clap. A man called Martin Luther was sent from God—and the face of the world was changed. But the result which seemed so sudden was not sudden. As we now see more clearly it was only a culmination; Luther only applied the igniting spark to a train which had been laid during a long period of obscure and silent preparation.

The whole history of the world is witness to this truth. The whole spiritual movement of the world has gone forward by periods of preparation, during which the forces of progress were silently gathering strength, accumulating even in times of apparent reaction and disaster, and which at last came to a head and burst forth in the sudden and glorious birth of a new era. As when the tide is rising, wave after wave flows in only to ripple and break upon the beach, so countless waves of effort and prayer and sacrifice for the Kingdom of God spend themselves and disappear on the shore of time. Nevertheless the tide

rises; it floods one little creek and conquers one spit of sand after another; and at last one wave, riding on the shoulders of its forerunners, surmounts the bar, and the great ocean pours into the black, oozy harbour. So shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Or, as the snows gather upon the brow of the alp with soft and silent fall, and day by day through the long months of winter the fleecy showers still descend, and still the snow deepens and gathers, and still all is at peace and the village slumbers beneath the crag; until one day a last flake falls and the great white mass, overweighted, slips from its hold and the avalanche is started on its awful career, so with an avalanche not of destruction but of blessing do the great epochs of the Kingdom of God come. The forces of that Kingdom, generated by the prayers and labours and sacrifices of obscure people and undistinguished years, gather behind the barrier, unseen by the eye and unguessed by the thought of man, until at last the flood-gates are opened, and suddenly some great work is done, some ancient fabric of falsehood or evil is swept away.

So we set ourselves to the capture of some Jericho. We send out missionaries to India or China to convert the heathen. And after a little the mutter of discontent and disparagement is heard, or a feeling of apathy and disappointment succeeds to the first enthusiasm. The progress is wofully slow; there is scarcely progress at all; there are individual converts here and there, and persons with a head for figures calculate how much they cost apiece. But seemingly no impression is being made on the great systems of

heathenism, and if missionary enterprise is ever to be successful on a grand scale, why should it not show now some promise of being so? So our impatience argues. But what if all these our years of work in India, for example, are but the first day of our marching around Jericho, or the second? or what if it be already the sixth or the seventh? God does not publish his calendar. Of these times and seasons knoweth no man.

I recall an incident in the early annals of the London Missionary Society. That society had sent out no fewer than twenty-five missionaries to begin work in Tahiti and the Friendly Islands. Sixteen years of labour were spent to all appearance in vain. There had been no promise even of result; no streak of light, no presage of dawn had broken the night of heathenism. Not a single conversion; no manifestation of interest; no spirit of inquiry. Discouraged by the continued failure of the mission, and the unhopeful prospect, the directors of the society had seriously contemplated its abandonment. But better counsels prevailed. A season of special prayer was determined upon, and a reinforcement of workers along with letters of encouragement, was sent out. Now mark this: the vessel carrying these recruits and these letters was passed in mid-ocean by another homeward bound from Tahiti, carrying to England—not only the tidings of the entire overthrow of idolatry in that island, but the trophies of the victory, the dethroned and rejected idols themselves. So suddenly did the Lord of the vineyard in the South Seas pay to His labourers the arrears due to sixteen years of apparently unrewarded and fruitless toil, and

with such interest as the most sanguine had never dreamt of.

God pays all such arrears. He does not publish his calendar, I say; but the seventh day will always come, and it will pay for the whole long week. We may ourselves be living on the eve of some great day of the Lord. We cannot know but before any year ends we may see some great purpose of Providence fulfilled, the death-blow given to some long-lived evil, the sudden dawn of some new and brighter day in the world's and the Church's history. Whether it come soon or late, it will always come. But, let us remember, the way for every triumph is paved by the patient, plodding effort of every day and of all the years as they pass. Prepare ye the way of the Lord; when the way is prepared the Lord will come,

The Judge that comes in mercy,
The Judge that comes with might,
To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right.

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, being compassed about seven days.” The Duke of Wellington always ascribed his victories to his men; but, when asked whether the British soldier was braver than the soldiers of other nations, he said: “No, the British soldier was no braver than others, but he could be depended on to be brave for just fifteen minutes longer than the others.” In all the great battles of life it is this that turns the scale. It is not enough to be brave; you must be brave a little longer than your antagonist. Soldiers of Christ, in the holy warfare of our own lives and in the

warfare of the Kingdom, we ought to be braver than others, and above all we must be brave longer than they. We must fulfil the seven days. We must win the reward of cumulative effort. Let ours be the faith that rests upon the Everlasting and doubts not; let ours be the zeal that works with both hands earnestly; let ours be the persistence which endures to the end. By faith our Jericho shall fall, being compassed about seven days.

XV

CAIN AND CHRIST

Gen. 4: 1-8; 1 John 3: 10-16.

Though there was no song of angels when Cain came into the world there was song in a woman's heart. His mother called him Cain, because (she said) I have gotten a man from the Lord. Yes! a man, a new man, a man from the Lord; and with this new copy of God's image lying in her arms she said, like the mother of Christ, My soul doth magnify the Lord. Like Mary! We have called Mary the Mother of Sorrows, but surely the title better befits the mother of Cain than the mother of Christ. Eve thought that Cain was Christ; that the babe God had sent her was the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head. Many a son has trampled a mother's hopes into the mire, but none ever trampled upon such a hope as Cain. For Cain was not the Christ; he is the typical opposite of Christ—"Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." That is why the Apostle John brings him into his Epistle. It is to set Cain over against the glory of Christ. Cain the murderer, Christ the Saviour; Cain the incarnation of selfishness and hate, Christ the incarnation of God who is love—these two are our Elder Brothers, so to say, the representatives of the two great camps into which mankind is divided and of the two powers which struggle for

the empire of the world and of every human life. "Cain or Christ," the apostle seems to say; "consider whether this spirit rules your life or that, whether you are of the tribe of Cain or belong to the holy family of Christ."

"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." But, one is tempted to ask, does not the apostle speak here in a violently exaggerated strain? What has Cain in common with ordinary, average humanity? He was a murderer, a monster of flagrant wickedness. He killed his brother. His sin cried to heaven. Seldom, even among the criminal classes, will one be found whose soul is so set on fire with the worst passions of hell.

But let us hearken to what follows. "Whosoever hateth his brother." This seems more relevant. The shells no longer fly harmlessly over our heads; we are in the danger zone. "Whosoever hateth his brother"—well, what of him?—"is a murderer." But again you may say this is the language of exaggeration. It will be expedient, at any rate, before we commit ourselves to acceptance of it, to be clear as to what is meant.

Hate, like love, is a word which is used in a wide variety of senses. We sometimes speak of "hating" a person or thing when we mean no more than *strong dislike*, the feeling of something intensely distasteful or uncongenial. But dislike is not hate. We are under no moral obligation to like anyone; for liking is a matter, not of choice, but of nature.

I do not like thee, Dr. Fell;
The reason why, I cannot tell,
But, I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.

But because we do not and cannot like the Doctor, we do not necessarily hate him. The very core of Christian ethics, it has been said, is learning to love persons whom we do not like. Yet, *without love*, dislike will always deepen into hate; and if you were, let us say, an Oriental tyrant, you would need no other reason for extinguishing a man, any more than for crushing a mosquito, than simply that he aroused in you a feeling of strong dislike.¹

Again, people say that they "hate" a person, meaning thereby *indignation* against him as an evil-doer, passionate repudiation of the man and his deeds. But indignation is not hatred, although again, when love is absent, it is sure to degenerate into hatred and sheer vindictiveness. Nor, again, is the spirit of *rivalry* hatred. Rivalry may be entirely generous. It is the essence of good sportsmanship, as we say, to bear no ill-will to another who is exerting his powers in rivalry with oneself, and to feel no bitterness if he prove himself the better man. The principle of rivalry is rooted in the very constitution of nature and could not be eliminated from society without disaster. But, again, where love and goodwill are absent, rivalry does inevitably breed hatred. Hatred in the true sense is *ill-will*, the malevolent disposition, the desire to inflict injury and the delight in the infliction of pain or humiliation upon another; and St. John always goes on the assumption that either we must love men or we shall hate them. And that is the truth of the matter. It may appear that to the majority of persons our attitude may be one of

¹Read Browning's *Instans Tyrannus*.

simple indifference; but indifference, like neutrality in war, is possible only while other lives with their interests and claims do not touch ours. Just as the chemical constituents of gunpowder may be said to be indifferent to each other until the igniting spark falls upon them, so is it with our relations to our fellowmen. The potentialities of love and hate are always present in them. Let any man in Toronto, towards whom your feelings are an absolute blank, be preferred to a situation or an honour to which you consider you have a superior claim—will he be an object of indifference to you then? The apostle is profoundly right in his psychology. If we have not the Spirit of Christ, that of Cain may be slumbering within us; but it is only slumbering. Conflicting interests and natural antipathies will evoke actual malevolence, will make us hate.

But St. John proceeds with his sharp-pointed sentence, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a *murderer*." Shakespeare is his echo: "Hates any man the thing he would not kill?" Still, in spite of both, is this verdict sound? Certainly there are a vast number of persons who hate, who have a pronounced and fixed ill-will towards some fellowman, but with whom the desire or even the idea of slaying the object of their hate is unconceived and inconceivable. Yet St. John and Shakespeare truly diagnose the case. Hate is ill-will; and murder is ill-will carried to the extreme of action. One case of small-pox may be more virulent than another case, but both are cases of small-pox; and hate differs from murder only as a milder differs from a more virulent attack of the same disease, only as a

maniac under restraint differs from a maniac running amuck. Let hate loose; release it from the restraint of circumstances, of conventional ideas, of the sensibilities of civilised man to which violence and bloodshed are repulsive; let hate act out its impulse spontaneously and freely, and it infallibly would, as it does with the savage or the irresponsible tyrant, kill. Hatred, ill-will, is the capital offence in the spiritual kingdom, as murder, ill-will become ill-doing, is in the kingdoms of this world.

“Whosoever hateth.” ¹Some one has said that he thanked God for the “whosoever” of the Bible. It is a widehearted word, with a smile and a welcome for everyone. It is the “crook by which the Good Shepherd feels for, and finds, and draws to himself his wandering sheep.” “Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.” But here it is a fearsome word. It is “an officer bearing the king’s warrant for the arrest of offenders.” And this writ runs everywhere. It searches not only the dens of vice, the squalid purlieus where oaths and blows resound. It comes into our homes and our places of business, into our politics and public assemblies and into our private thoughts; it comes into the midst of us here, into the pew and up into the pulpit, saying, “Who is he that hateth his brother? Let him come and stand in the dock side by side with Cain, his elder brother.”

But the most appalling thing about Cain is not that

¹I am indebted in this paragraph to Dr. Gibbon’s fine exposition of First John, p. 74.

he hated and slew his brother; it is the reason for his doing so. "And wherefore slew he him?" Incredible as it may appear, it was "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." One cannot conceive a sentence which sheds a more awful light than this upon the evil possibilities of the human heart. His brother's works were righteous; therefore with good reason Cain loved and honoured his brother, praised and encouraged him in well-doing, unfeignedly rejoiced that, however far he himself fell short, his brother at least was taking the high and noble way? Instead of this, he hated and slew him—hated and slew him *because* his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. How truly preposterous a reason! How diabolical the heart it reveals—the envious heart that "withers at another's joy, and hates the excellence it cannot reach." I beg of you to look at Envy as you see it in that vivid sentence: "And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous." If we did not know envy as a fact and an experience we should pronounce it an impossibility, a horror belonging to some grotesque nightmare-world, and to no real world at all. That one man can actually hate another for being better than himself, or more talented, more useful or successful—to the angels, I imagine, this must be actually unintelligible. And yet what makes this mystery of iniquity possible is a thing which in itself is not only innocent and good, but fundamental to our moral nature—self-love. Self-love is one of the pillars of manhood. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." If we did not love ourselves it is certain that we could

not love any other person. But, as one of our great teachers has said, the whole misery and ruin of our sinful state is that self-love has taken in addition to its own place the place of love to God and to our brother also. Self-love is not hate; but without love, it has in it all the materials of hate. So it was with Cain. His brother's manifest superiority was too cruel a wound to his passionate pride in himself; it bred in him a sullen envy, and at last goaded him to madness. And if the spirit of Christ has not conquered the spirit of Cain in you, you naturally hate the rival who shines with a brighter light in the world than yours, who in any way puts you in the shade, and hurts your self-esteem. Your jealous self-love, like Cain's, leaps out like a sword from its scabbard.

Brethren, I bid you again look at *envy* in the person of Cain. There are sins which are due to weakness of the flesh. We are liable to them because we dwell in bodies of flesh and blood, and are overcome by their appetites or shrink from their pains. We would not be liable to these sins if we were freed from this corruptible body; and we shall be no more tempted to them when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption. But envy needs no bodily organ. Envy is pure devil. Heaven itself could not cure envy. There envy still would

Knit its frown
At one who wore a brighter crown.

There is nothing that ought to make every man, and that does make every truly sane and good man more deeply ashamed of his character than an uprising of envy in his heart, nothing that will give more poignant

reality to the prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." But be of good cheer, you who feel the shame of it and stamp upon its viperous head. In you the divine impulse is at work, and the strong man armed must yield to the strongest.

For this bane of human life there is an antidote, only one. The Cain in us must be extirpated by the Christ in us. As virtues are best illustrated by their contraries, the apostle has introduced here this gloomy, sinister figure of Cain only as a foil to another, the fairest and best of all. We are now away from the gates of Eden; we are outside the walls of Jerusalem. It is not Abel who is being killed; it is Christ, Christ who is laying down His life for the men who hated and mocked and slew Him. Instead of the mystery of envious hate we gaze upon the mystery of self-forgetting love. How amazing are both—Cain who offered his brother a victim to his enraged and rampant self-love, Christ who offered Himself as love's sacrifice to others' needs; Cain who slew his brother because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous, Christ whose own works were righteous, but who took on Him the burden and the shame of His brothers' evil deeds, and cried, "Father, forgive them!" "Herein," says St. John, "know we love." Here we recognize its nature, its purest essence—not in the idyllic loves of Jacob and Rachel, or the romantic friendship of David and Jonathan, not in the tender affection of parent and child, but in this, that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, not a day or a year of His life, but all the years and all the days and all the strength and all the gifts of it, all that Jesus could have made

of that life for His own pleasure and glory—laid it all down with a patience that never faltered, a self-sacrifice that knew no limit. This, this pure, spontaneous, self-begotten, entire devotion of Jesus Christ to men who hated Him without a cause is Love—"Love divine, all loves excelling."

Once more look on this picture and on that: Cain who glutted his devouring self-love in a brother's blood, Christ who could appease the yearnings of His heart only by pouring out His life for His brethren. Know that in the one or the other of these we see our spiritual affinity. Our souls are stamped with the family-likeness of Cain or with that of Christ. There is no third class to which we can belong. There are all shades, degrees and differences within each class; but these are the two radical types, the formative principles, the opposite powers that have always manifested themselves in human history and that to-day are contending for the mastery of the world and of human life. The spirit of Cain is abroad in the world to-day. It is the spirit of all the men who seek to become rich at the expense of others less shrewd or less advantageously situated than themselves, or to become strong by trampling upon the weak; of all men who pursue their pleasure at the expense of others' happiness, at the cost of other men's or women's bodies or souls. It is the spirit which alienates man from man, which evokes mutual jealousies, which sows the seeds of enmity between Labour and Capital, which keeps the nations armed to the teeth in mutual fear and makes what we call "peace" only potential war, which begets and propagates the baneful falsehood of conflicting

interests between man and man, class and class, nation and nation.¹ But, thanks be to God! the Christ-spirit is also abroad in the world. It is the spirit of all men who have learned the Divine secret, that it is more blessed to enrich others at one's own expense than oneself at theirs, of all men who seek and find their joy in giving others joy, who seek to be great only in service, and desire, like Christ, to minister rather than to be ministered unto; yes, and are ready even to suffer with Him who gave His life a ransom for many. The question is, On which side are you and I? There is no question on which side final victory lies. Christ is stronger than Cain; notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, the Christ spirit is winning the day. Life is ever lord of Death; and Love can never lose its own. The crucial question, the great choice in its ultimate, plainest terms is this—Cain or Christ? There is much wrangling about religion to-day; many things are questioned or denied, and God has left many things in doubt. But one thing God leaves in no doubt at all—the Heavenly Vision. It is impossible to doubt for a single moment that in Christ we see the Spirit of the Highest.

If Jesus Christ is a man,
And only a man, I say,
That of all mankind I cleave to him
And to him will cleave away.

Young men, do you say that?—I will take Christ as my ideal, and to him I will cleave away. That is not

¹This sermon belongs to the days before the war. I leave it as it was written.

full Christianity, but it is the first step to it. If you take that step, you will be necessitated to take another.

But if Jesus Christ is God,
And the only God, I swear,
I will follow him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, the air.

You will find that with the Ideal Man you need the Living God to be your strength and your redeemer; and you will find the Living God revealed and present to your need only in Christ. Young men, I do not vastly long for you to be orthodox Presbyterians, but my heart's desire for you is that you be Christ's men. The world is calling for the higher manhood, the manhood of Jesus Christ, the "manifestation of the sons of God." Your own souls are made and are crying for it. Stand boldly forth for Christ as against Cain, first in yourselves, then in the world. Remember that this means not a hasty profession, not a merely sentimental response to an entrancing ideal, but living a life. It means following Christ not through heaven or hell, but where God calls you and sends you to serve. God is Love. "Herein know we love, that He laid down his life for us. My little children, let us love not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth; and hereby we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him."

XVI

THE BLOOD OF ABEL AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.—Gen. 4: 10.

The blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.—Heb. 12: 24.

Last Lord's Day I took the Apostle John as our commentator on this old-world narrative; and he led us into the heart of its teaching, showing us the opposite poles of the moral kingdom in the envious, murderous hate of Cain and the self-sacrificing love of Christ. This morning the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews shall perform for us a similar office. Not less impressive than St. John's is the use he makes of this ancient story, when at the very heart of all the glories of the Gospel, in the innermost shrine, he points us to "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." What was it that the blood of Abel spoke? And what are the better things the blood of Christ speaks?

God said to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"; and Cain did not need to have it told him what that blood was crying for. Observe that it was "the voice of thy brother's *blood*." Abel did not cry for vengeance. Abel, had he been permitted to speak, would have pleaded every reason why mercy should rejoice against judgment.

“Poor, pitiable Cain!” he would have said, “it was hard for him to see his younger brother preferred before him. I know not whether, if so tempted, I might not have shown myself as envious as he.” Abel would have suspected something far amiss in himself that made him to be such an offence and stumbling-block to his brother. He had rejoiced too inconsiderately and with too little fellow-feeling for his brother’s chagrin, when his own offering was accepted and Cain’s despised. Yes, we may be sure that as he passed into the presence of the Judge, Abel said, “Father, forgive my brother; he was mad, blind with passion; he knew not what he did.”

But—here is the terrible thing—while Abel forgives, his blood will not forgive. Abel could not silence his own accusing blood; he could not stop the wheels of Cain’s destiny. And this dread truth is often repeated in the Bible, and in the same terms. “When he maketh inquisition for blood,” says the Psalmist, “he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.” The “humble” do not cry for vengeance in the day of inquisition, but their blood is clamorous. No one has made sterner proclamation of it than our Lord Himself, when He declared that the blood of all the prophets which had been shed from the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel onward, would be required of that impenitent generation. Then there is that remarkable passage in the Book of Revelation, where the seer beholds under the altar the souls of the martyrs; which cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

Do the holy martyrs in paradise thirst for vengeance? Do they impatiently urge and importune the Lord of Hosts to gird His sword upon His thigh? A thousand times, no! Yet they cannot help doing it. Their blood, the very presence before God of those tortured and slaughtered saints, cries to Him for righteous vengeance.

God set a mark upon Cain, we read; and commentators have been much exercised as to what this mark may have been. Let me tell you what it was. It was this God wrote on Cain's brow, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." It was the mark one has seen on other brows than Cain's, the mark which proclaims so visibly that God has taken a man into His own terrible hands for punishment, that at the sight the claims of human justice are silent, and indignation against the wrong-doer becomes solemn pity for the victim of his own wrongdoing.

A belief in divine retribution, retribution greater and more inescapable than man's, is one of the most universal and irresistible of our moral instincts. It has often been expressed in crudely superstitious forms—haunting ghosts, avenging furies with snaky tresses that chase the wrong-doer to his doom—but beneath these very superstitions there lies the truth, which every man in his soul knows to be true, of a divine Nemesis that follows wrongdoing, that cannot be eluded, cannot be turned aside or baffled in its pursuit. Vengeance is a terrible word, always. On the lips of those who thirst for it and gloat over it, it is a horrible, a fiendish word. But it is also a holy word, a divine word. Vengeance is the joy only of a devil;

but it is the infinitely sad yet holy necessity of a Righteous God, His work, though His strange work.

And this is a truth which needs to be emphasized, because it is not popular with us to-day. The feeling of the present age—perhaps one should say, the present hour—sets strongly against all conceptions of retribution.¹ We seem to think not that wrong is the greatest of evils, but that pain is. We seem to have acquired Christ's compassionate recoil from the suffering that vexes and darkens human life, but to have closed our eyes to that principle of righteousness which also asserts itself so powerfully in Christ's spirit and teaching. There is a sentiment abroad which will scarcely allow such a word as *wrath*, and would have the violation of the laws of God and man to be condoned and glossed over. The God many people want is just an amiable, good-natured deity, who is ready to find an excuse for everybody and everything. They may not say with Omar Khayyam, "Tush! He's a good fellow, and 'twill all be well," or with Heine, "God will forgive, it is his trade": but "Tell us," they say to the preacher, "tell us about the Infinite Pity that enfolds all in its embrace. Magnify the gentleness and tenderness of Christ, and minimize that other side, if you cannot altogether abolish it. It is not in accordance with the tendencies of modern thought." Well, it may not be; but it is in accordance with the eternal truth and the unchangeable nature of things.

¹This utterance belongs to the days before the war, before the Belgian and Armenian atrocities, before German and Turk had soaked the earth with innocent blood. Shares in heaven-and-hell amalgamation societies are now at a discount.

God is Love. That is the light and glory of the Gospel. But love has many facets, and one of them is righteousness. Love is not the easy good-nature that will tolerate wrong rather than inflict pain. "Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." Justice is in the end the true mercy. Think what would be the state of the world, of the universe, if God looked with the same amiable complacency upon the evil and the good, showed Himself the same toward the wrong-doer and his victim! If Cain, if any man like Cain, the tyrant, the seducer, the defrauder, the slanderer, the trafficker in iniquity, if such a man could go on fearless and triumphing in wrong for ever! Ought a God who is Love to be at peace with such a man? Do not our hope and our strength in the presence of wrong like his come just from the certainty that he will be brought soon or late to face his sin, that wherever that man goes, whatever his wealth may be, whatever his magnitude or his minuteness, there is One whose hand will reach him, One who is the relentless antagonist of his sin, and until he repent and become changed in spirit will be his antagonist too? God, *because* He is Love, must be righteous. It must be inherent in the very constitution of a universe created and conducted by love, that right shall be vindicated and that impenitent wrong shall meet with the full force of God's antagonism and displeasure. And it is even so. It is no superstition that the blood of Abel cries to heaven. It is an obstinate, irreducible fact in the constitution of the human soul. It is a fact writ large in the history of the world, of nations and of men. When Abel is

crushed in his weakness, ground down under the heel of the strong—aye, when he is dead and buried and out of mind, the voice of his blood is mighty still. By the cry of Israel, bleeding through the bitter enslavement of centuries, the throne of Pharaoh is overturned and Egypt's might laid low. Built upon the blood and bondage of weaker nations, the empires of Assyria and Babylon tumble into ruin. French revolutions, American civil wars, Irish agitations, all tell the same story: the wrongs of an oppressed populace rise from the dust and claim redress, "History," says a great historian, "has a Nemesis for every crime." And though it may work hiddenly, God's justice works unerringly. Such a law is one of the pillars of the universe.

Have you and I anything to do with this law? No brother's blood cries against us from the ground; but are there none we have wronged? No tears we have caused to be shed, which God has put into His bottle? No hearts we have saddened, none whom we have overreached, whose reputation we have wounded with our tongues, none to whom we have been unjust or unkind? Let us bethink ourselves; for God is the avenger of all such. "If therefore thou layest thy gift upon the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, first go and be reconciled to thy brother." Confess your fault; offer your apology, make amends; undo the wrong when you can and so far as you can; then come and offer thy gift.

The Old Testament speaks of a brother's blood which cries to high heaven for vengeance. The New

Testament speaks of a blood which has an opposite virtue, which cries for mercy, which does not stain but cleanse—the “blood of sprinkling,” the blood of Christ, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Here we come upon one of those wonderful, universal truths which are woven into the warp and woof of all life, and which broaden out and deepen endlessly as we look at them. The history of the world is written in blood; and the blood in which it is written throughout is of these two kinds, the blood of Abel that curses and the blood of Christ that redeems and saves. In all human history we see these two powers contending, balanced one against the other—life that is selfishly taken and life that is unselfishly given. In all ages the blood of Abel and his successors has been shed; the life of the innocent, the weak and helpless has been in every way exploited and preyed upon. It has been crying to heaven against the injustice and ruthlessness of man to man, against the pride and greed and lust that have used up the lives and drunk the blood of countless victims, against the callousness which uses Abel as a mere tool which, when it is blunt and worn out, it throws without a qualm upon the scrap-heap. What a weight of curse the blood of all the long generation of Abel has laid upon the world! And terribly has it been expiated. But always blood of a contrary quality and effect has been flowing for the redemption of the world. Consciously or unconsciously millions of men and women have given themselves for the world’s salvation. When John Williams fell under the cannibal’s club on the fatal shore of Erromange, when Livingstone offered up his

life for Africa, their blood invoked no curse, but claimed for the South Seas and the Dark Continent a new era of blessing. Their self-sacrifice laid it on both God and man to win whole lands and nations from darkness and savagery to Christian light and freedom. All through the ages the world has been baptised and the roots of human life enriched by the blood of patriots, heroes, martyrs, and by the self-sacrifice of multitudes of humble people who have made other lives richer by their toil, sweeter by their love, or nobler by their virtue. From the beginning this crimson stream of self-sacrifice has been running with a mighty power of help and healing for the sicknesses of humanity and of redemption from its sin and curse. Yet all that sacrificial blood shed from the foundation of the world could not overcome sin. It could not so relate itself to God on the one hand and to the guilt of every individual soul on the other hand as to give to men the consciousness of a Divine redeeming power and of restored harmony with the moral order of life. This needed

A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

No doctrine is quite so familiar to us as that of the atoning death of Christ; and there is none upon which it is more difficult to rationalise. When we have done our utmost to explore its depths, we feel that there is still an unfathomed deep beneath. But the first thing that meets us in that death of Calvary is that in some way we are all directly related to it as to no other. We feel instinctively of Christ as of no

other, that He tasted death for every man. The sacrifice of Calvary is not a mere fact of history. Christ's cross is ours; His infinite sorrows and dying pangs are ours. That is the heart of Christianity. It is that faith, that consciousness of Christ, which created Christianity, and which is forever its life and the source of its power. And I wish to speak for a few minutes more of two elements which are most surely contained in this Christian consciousness of Christ and His sacrificial blood.

First, there is this, that Christian faith finds in the Blood of Christ the unique act and manifestation of the love, that is the life, of God. I have said that sacrificial blood has been shed from the beginning of the world in the unselfish toils and sorrows and sacrifices of millions. Wherein, you may ask, is the sacrifice of Christ different except in degree? Wherein is this redemptive any otherwise than every loving deed by which men seek a wider and higher good than their own? Well, for the present, I am content to answer in the words of St. Paul: "God commendeth *his love* towards us, in that while we were yet sinners *Christ died* for us." Every Christian soul feels instinctively how impossible it would be to substitute another name for Christ's in that sentence, to say, for example, that God commended his love towards the people of Africa because while they were yet sinners David Livingstone died for them. God's love, Christ's death—these are equivalent terms. Some of the early Fathers of the Church were thought to be too daring, if not heretical, because they spoke of the Blood of the Cross as the Blood of God. I

should not be anxious to acquit myself of their heresy. To me the Cross of Calvary is the manifestation in our humanity, in His Son Jesus Christ, of the Cross of God, that cross of suffering, sorrowing love with which the sins and follies of men have pierced and still pierce the heart of the Eternal. That is what the Gospel means. It takes us to Bethlehem, to Gethsemane; it shows us One nailed to a cross for us, burdening Himself with all our burdens, pouring out in death His infinite love and pity for us, and says to us, "God *so loved* the world." I am not going to argue about it. But it is this that is ingrained in the consciousness of every Christian soul; that changes the soul's winter into summer, that means everlasting hope for every one of us and for all the world.

Because, from this springs the second unique power in the Blood of Christ, that it is the "blood of sprinkling"; it cleanses from sin; it breaks the bonds in which sin binds us; and as the blood of Abel destroys, the Blood of Christ restores the harmony of our sinful lives with the moral order of the universe established and maintained by God. That is the primal and universal need; and it is that utmost human need which finds God's utmost grace in the Blood of Christ. I do not attempt to argue or theorise. I say only that this is in the heart of all Christian faith. But this I would ask: Have we ever tried to think how stupendous a belief this is? Have we considered what that word, Atonement, means—how incalculable and almost incredible a virtue this is we attribute to the Blood of Christ, the power really to *atone*, to make amends to God and to man for all the evil that has

been done or ever will be done, for all the sin of all the men and women who have sinned against God and man from the beginning, and will so sin unto the end of the ages? Christ atones for everything. Christ makes up for everything, makes up to God, to man, for everything. I cannot tell you how that is to be, how God in time and eternity is working out the results of that atonement, both towards Himself and towards our fellowmen and in the whole universe of being. But this is the Christian faith, that in Him we have redemption through His Blood, and that in Him God will reconcile all things unto Himself, and if to Himself then also to one another. And I believe that when a man's conscience is fully awakened to the character of sin, this is the only sufficient refuge for him. This is the Rock whose shadow is salvation. And I know that he who so trusts himself to Christ will have the witness in himself.

¹A young woman who had lived a life of sin lay dying in a hospital. Some one had read to her the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah: "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities"; and through these words she had believed in the love of Christ to her a sinner. Her friends stood by waiting for the end, when suddenly she pushed a thin hand from under the coverlet and, pointing to it with a finger of the other hand, said, "There is no mark of the nails here; He was wounded for my transgressions." Then again she lay silent, until once more the hands moved, and putting them to her brow, she said, "There

¹The incident is told by Henry Drummond.

are no thorns here; He was bruised for my iniquities." Again she was still, so still they thought her gone. But a third time she looked up, and clasping her hands across her breast, said, "There is no spear-wound here; He was wounded for my transgressions; He was bruised for my iniquities." Then she passed away, having the witness of God's peace in herself.

Yes, the Blood of sprinkling speaketh better things than that of Abel. Do some of you hear accusing voices in your conscience? Listen to that other voice, which outcries and drowns all accusing voices. Have many of us listened to both these voices? Then let us remember what we owe; and, absolved from the paralysing debt of sin, let us gladly pay with our whole life the never-ending debt of love.

XVII

THE GRAND ADVENTURE

He went out, not knowing whither he went.—Heb. 11 : 8.

“England was never made by her statesmen; England was made by her adventurers,” says General Gordon, himself one of that lion-hearted band; and if we qualify it by adding that there are adventurers in every region of human thought and activity, the statement is true. Not the men who are fettered by precedent and tradition, who sit timidly brooding over ways and means or who busy themselves in raking the embers of dead fires, but those who have heard a call from afar, who have felt the stir of some divine impulse in their souls, and like Abraham, the father and pattern of all such adventurers, have gone out not knowing whither they went, are the men who have made not the British Empire only, but everything great and good that is the common heritage of mankind. And we are all in some sense adventurers. Life is one great adventure, and Death is another, from which none of us can escape. And what Gordon said of England may be said of Life, that they will make most of it and get the best out of it who treat it as an adventure, who take it in the spirit of those who walk not by narrow calculation but by faith.

There are three ways in which the Journey of Life

may present itself to us. The first is, when the goal is in sight and when also the way to it seems to be in sight; to travel by schedule and programme as we do on a railway journey, when we can foretell what scenes we shall pass through at a particular part of the road, where we shall make our connections, and by what route and at what time we shall reach the terminus. It is in this fashion we like to travel, foreseeing and prearranging the successive stages of the journey, saying: "To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain." And we must scheme and purpose thus. We must lay out our own little plan of life within the orbit of God's great plan, construct our little world of human prudence within the great world of God's Providence—to do anything else would be to live the life of an idiot. Still, remember, it is an adventure; if not of faith, then of doubt. When men plan and purpose as if they had absolute control over events, over other men, or even over themselves, they make themselves but a broader target for the shafts of fate. How history has been preaching that to us! How eighteen months ago, as at a thunderclap, the whole aspect of life was transformed, all preconceived ideas went by the board and the incredible stood before us in stark reality! And none have been so much taken by surprise as those who planned the surprise. The Kaiser and his staff saw their Canaan of world-empire full in view, and, as they deemed, the way to it also lay before them distinct as a diagram. Theirs was no Abrahamic adventure. On such and such a week at Paris—their heel on the neck of France—the sudden spring at

Russia's throat; the war was over, and Germany bestriding the world like a colossus! And all that the astutest brains could devise and the most perfect organisation in the world execute was wrecked on an uncharted rock. Just one or two tiny bits of grit getting into the mechanism deranged the whole diabolical plot. And to-day Germany is like a great fish caught in the toils of a strong net, within which it may rush and plunge mightily, even to breaking some of the meshes, but from which it cannot escape. Seldom has history written so vivid a commentary on that grim saying of the Psalmist: He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. If we can conceive of a kind of derisive humour in the Most High, it must surely be excited when He sees men or nations laying out their future without reference to Him. And whether there be a God or not, and whether we acknowledge Him or not, we must at any rate go forth not knowing whither we go. Beyond the spot where we now plant our feet the road is all mist; and without the vision of God in it, life is little else than a gambler's throw of the dice. Yet this, the mere impossibility of eliminating the factor of the unforeseen and unforeseeable, does not constitute the great, high adventure of life.

Then, again, the goal may be visible, but not the way to it. A man has a fairly clear idea of the kind of happiness or success he desires to achieve. There, visible enough, is the peak he wants to scale; but there is no map or telescope by which he can certainly trace the way to the summit. He can but begin to climb, looking a short way ahead, trusting that when he has reached yonder eminence or worked his way round that

rock-barrier, the next stage of the ascent will discover itself to him. It is thus the world's successful man accomplishes the journey—the goal clear in view from the beginning, the path opening itself up to his watchful observation and patient effort. And no one will deny that this has a spice of romance in it. Every man who has had his dream and has realized it, or who has failed to realize it, has had at least his adventure; and in many a case the adventure proves to be worth a great deal more than the success, or is more than compensation for the failure.

Yet if the journey ends at any visible goal, if the whole lies within the region of sense and calculation, neither is this the true adventure of life. That comes to men when both the goal is beyond the horizon and the way to it lies unexplored and unseen. Such is the journeying of all the great adventurers. They set off into regions unknown, impelled by some mysterious instinct of the soul, following a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night which no eye but theirs might see. Tireless seekers of the unfound, they would voyage "beyond the sunset and the baths of all the western stars"; or, like Columbus, set sail for what to themselves was but a dream, trusting the voice within that by holding on and ever on they would sail at last into some new world. And such men are types of the true adventurers, the men of religious faith. For, has it ever occurred to you that if all life is more or less an adventure, its greatest, sublimest adventure is what we call religion—that religion is the essential romance of life? That is what I wish to help you to feel this morning. That is what the lives of all the saints

reveal to us. It is what this story of Abraham is here to teach us.

That departure of Abraham from his kindred and his father's house—you can see it all before your eyes: the laden camels slowly pacing, towering above the bleating flocks, the cries of the drovers, the wail of women's voices as they cling to their loved ones before parting forever, the silent hand-clasp of strong men whose eyes glisten with unshed tears—then the long march begun, while those who stay behind strain wistful eyes across the broad flood of Euphrates until the departing caravan is lost in a haze of dust on the far horizon. It is in any case a romantic scene, the start of a high adventure. But what makes it supremely so? That Abraham went out by an unknown way in quest of an unknown heritage? Thousands of men have done as much. Had it been some wealthy syndicate that despatched Abraham to Canaan with the promise of a goodly estate in it; had he gone, placing his reliance on the rose-coloured report of some emigration-agent or the prospectus of a real estate company, we should never have heard of so ordinary an occurrence. But because it was not men he believed but God, because he fared forth on his great adventure in response to that voice which he knew to be the voice of God, therefore his journey is held up to us not as an everyday matter, but as an event of real moment and grandeur. Nothing more romantic can be conceived; for what is the soul of all romance but just faith, faith in a person, faith in a cause, in an ideal or a mission? And is not the highest romance the highest faith—faith in the unseen God and the divine ideal of life,

faith in the sovereignty of God and the coming Kingdom of God, faith in the divine mission for each of us to live for that ideal and to seek first that kingdom?

And it is to this that Christ makes His supreme appeal. He appeals to the intellect, but yet more to that instinctive side of our nature which is higher than intellect, to the spiritual imagination, to the chivalrous emotions, to the spirit of adventure—in a word, to Faith. He came himself with nothing but an infinite faith in God and God's redeeming love. He came in that faith wedded to the infinite adventure of bringing to the world the Kingdom of God's redeeming love. And in seeking to draw others into the same adventure He did not appeal primarily to the intellect. He refused to capture allegiance by signs, but sought to fill and impassion men with His own glowing faith in God and the coming Kingdom and its new ideal of life. His call is the call of faith to faith, of the "deep" in Him to the "deep" in others, a call to supreme adventure. The whole Gospel-story moves in this atmosphere of spiritual romance. How romantic is that scene where we witness the beginning of the Church—the great Society—where Jesus, walking on the shore, comes to those fishermen busy with their nets, and says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Though they know little, next to nothing, of what that "following" means and whither it will lead them, they hear in it the same voice Abraham heard, and without a word obey. And when later He adds to this "Follow me" "Take up thy cross: hate father and mother, wife and children, home and lands

and thine own life also," this is not to damp but only to fan to a deeper and steady glow the spirit of daring enterprise, to lure men on by the incentives of difficulty and antagonism.

And so, I repeat, Religion, faith in the Divine and Eternal, is the essential romance of man's life here on earth, the one sublime adventure offered to us all. Always the greatest exploits of human life, the most moving episodes of human action, are those in which men are seen dealing in the greatest way with the greatest circumstances; and these greatest circumstances are the same for us all—God, Duty, Life, Death. Without stirring from the spot where you are you may traverse the vastest distances, make the most momentous discoveries—win or lose the most decisive battles. Is it a romantic thing when a man sets out to reach the Pole or climb some virgin peak of the Rockies or the Himalayas? What then is it to fix one's mark beyond the world, beyond life, beyond death; to set out on a journey to the Eternal City? Is it a romantic thing for our young men to leave all and go forth with their lives in their hands in order to fight our battle against the enemies of civilization? Verily it is an ennobling spectacle to see so many capable of putting a great and generous cause above comfort and career, dealing thus simply and heroically with the greatest things, God, Duty, Life, Death. But these greatest things are not far from any one of us. Not only the soldier who in the testing hour looks death unflinchingly in the face; the poor sempstress in the cheap boarding-house who refuses to eke out a scanty pittance

with the wages of sin; the youth who turns his back on tempting worldly prospects to devote his life to the service of the Gospel at home or abroad; the politician who unselfishly serves the community and in spite of opportunities and solicitations keeps his hands clean; the merchant who amid the fierce rivalries of the market-place refuses to stoop to the practices of unscrupulous competitors; the poor content in their poverty, the rich humble in their wealth, because God is theirs; the white-lipped sufferer bearing the cross of daily pain, so weak and worn, yet like the Master meekly drinking the cup the Father has given: in these and such as these, in all who on the level plain of daily life follow Christ, and on earth aim at Heaven, I see the grand romance of life. So does Christ call us to follow Him. He would appeal to us and thrill us with the sense of supreme adventure, with a high-hearted, courageous temper, ready in His strength for whatever may come.

And then, think how He helps to awaken this spirit in us by the very uncertainty of the future, or rather, I ought to say, by that combination of certainty and uncertainty, which makes life not a reckless gamble but the adventure of faith. Abraham went out not knowing whither he went; but God knew. Abraham did not plan the journey; God planned it and prepared for it, and when Abraham went forth at God's command he entered into God's plan and preparation. And I put it to you that this same wonderful possibility exists for each of us. I put it to you that not one of us comes into this world by haphazard, or to live a haphazard life in it. Every one of us has

a divine biography which he comes into life to live, a way and an end which is the good intended for him, which it is his privilege to reach, which he is called to reach, which he ought to reach, and which, if only he put his will in line with God's, God will guide him and strengthen him to reach.¹

Try to take firm hold of that thought of your divine biography. As we follow with lively interest some skilfully woven tale, eager at the end of each chapter to learn through what further experiences and adventures the author will next carry the creatures of his fancy, so how inspiring, how interesting—or romantic, shall I say?—it would make our own lives so to regard them; to say to ourselves at each critical turning-point, Now I shall see what the next chapter of my biography is destined to be; year by year, or day by day, to say, Let me learn another line of the part the Great Dramatist has written for me; let me discover what task he intends for me, what battle to be fought, or long stretch of quiet work to be done. Ah! did we regard life thus, as the divine adventure it is, it would change many things for us, and alter many values. In some respects we should take life more seriously than we do; in others, less seriously. More seriously because it is that awful adventure by which we stand to win or lose all; less seriously because it is only an adventure, a passing phase. To think of life so will give it a new dignity, a new serenity. It will teach you a new contentment; it will choke out the folly of envy and jealous com-

¹This thought is finely developed in Bushnell's great sermon, "Every man's life a plan of God."

plaining. And it will inspire a new courage. We shall never stand timidly and forebodingly on the brink of the task or the sacrifice before us, but only tighten our hold on God and go forward.

And, further, God is seeking to awaken this spirit in us by the nature of the times in which we are living. For truly we and all the world go out to-day not knowing whither we go. We thought we knew, knew very well, whither we were going. We were living in a calm and peaceful world; no catastrophe was on the horizon, there was no great fear or expectation to keep us on the alert. We had forgotten much of what is the teaching alike of the Gospel and of history. We believed thoroughly in the parables of the Mustard-seed and of the Leaven—the Gospel of evolution; we believed in the parable of the Talents—the Gospel of work; but we had ceased to believe in the parable of the Ten Virgins—the Gospel of divine interventions and surprises. We were worshipping an idol we called Progress, with no very clear idea of what we meant by progress—progress in what or toward what end—with just a vaguely optimistic notion that to-morrow would be as to-day but more abundant; that there would be more people, more trade, more money, more science, more comfort, more respectability, even more religion; that things would move on, very slowly and gradually, yet on the whole in the right direction. And, as was natural in such an atmosphere, Religion was falling asleep. In how terrible and dramatic fashion, God has disturbed our drowsiness and shattered our dreams! We have lived to witness what seems an eclipse of

civilization. We have been confronted with the spectacle of dying men—flowing blood and burning cities, and have learned what it means to stand in jeopardy every hour. We have seen how powerless our idols, Progress, Culture, Comfort, are to tame the worst passions of humanity, and how a civilisation which is of things rather than of spirit becomes the instrument of death, not of life. We are living through one of those days of the Lord when He comes as a fire to burn out the wood, hay, stubble, the rubbish and the rottenness, the greed and the laziness and the frivolity, from the edifice of society. Oh! it was needed. We thought we knew whither we were going; and a spirit of complacency and self-indulgence had come upon us. The mist was in our eyes, and the torpor was falling upon our limbs. Thank God, the awakening has not come altogether too late. And now when we know that we *know not* what a day may bring forth, we are all the more confident of the future, because more dependent on God. He has taken away our shoddy optimism to light in us a sure and living hope. A new and better chapter in the world's history is to be written. What its contents will be none can tell, though there be many prophets. But this we know, that Christ will write it and that His Glory will be manifested in it. It may be, it surely must be, that He will grant us some great, true revival of spiritual life. It may be that He will lead the way to social improvements and throw light upon the question, how rich and poor may dwell together in cordial and helpful brotherhood. It may be that He will bring to the sects of our divided Christendom a new realisa-

tion of their unity. It may be that He will spread the mantle of His peace over the nations and persuade them to cease hating and fearing one another, and to live in a rivalry of friendliness and mutual service. It may be this, it may be that, perhaps all of these. We know only that with a world that so pitifully needs Christ, and with a Christ who knows its needs and loves it and so tenderly pities its needs, there must be some coming of the Lord, some closer approach of His life to the world's life.

Therefore let us, like Abraham, take up courageously the adventure of life; let us go forth not knowing whither, but ready to enter into God's plan for the world and for ourselves as it unfolds itself. These are great days in which we live, fraught with tremendous issues; and before us there are great days in which we may have abundantly the joy of adventure for God, and the joy of achievement. Let our loins be girt and our lamps burning.

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